

PERSONALITY AND STRATEGY: HOW THE PERSONALITIES OF
GENERAL MACARTHUR AND ADMIRAL KING
SHAPED ALLIED STRATEGY IN THE
PACIFIC IN WORLD WAR TWO

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Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Personality and Strategy: How the Personalities of General Macarthur and Admiral King Shaped Allied Strategy in the Pacific in World War Two, by Kyle B. Beckman, 84 pages.

This thesis examines the impact that the dominant personalities of General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Ernest King had in shaping Allied strategy in the Pacific during the Second World War. The concept of dominant personality is defined as containing three essential elements: arrogance, tenacity, and supreme competence. The lives of MacArthur and King are examined, demonstrating that the actions of each consistently reflected these characteristics, allowing them to dominate those around them. Three key decisions from the Pacific war are scrutinized for the impact of one or both of these dominant personalities. King and MacArthur affected these decisions in different ways. In the first, the decision to initiate carrier raids against Japan in early 1942, King acted unopposed in pushing his audacious plans through. The second decision was to invade Guadalcanal (Operation Watchtower) in August 1942. King and MacArthur drove this decision in parallel competition, each striving to begin offensive operations and each desiring to be in control. Finally, the long competition between the Central and Southwestern Pacific drives for primacy, culminating with the debate over invading Luzon or Formosa, is examined. In this case, MacArthur and King pursued mutually exclusive courses and stalemate nearly resulted.

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ACRONYMS

CINCPOA	Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Area(s)
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COMINCH	Commander in Chief, United States Fleet
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JSSC	Joint Strategic Survey Committee
SWPA	Southwest Pacific Area

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The moral is to the physical as three is to one.¹

Napoleon Bonaparte

In the opening chapter of his broad historical study *Strategy*, B. H. Liddell Hart uses the enduring popularity of the above quote to illustrate the essential importance of the intangible factors of warfare, above and beyond the physical combat capabilities on the ground. Hart argues persuasively that while the physical character of warfare has changed dramatically from the Ancient Greek conflicts to the Second World War, the moral characteristics of effective campaigns have remained remarkably stable through the ages. He examines decisive campaigns throughout history with the goal of demonstrating that nearly all used what he terms the “indirect approach” to achieve victory. In the course of this study he returns again and again to the requirement to upset the psychological balance of the enemy in order to achieve victory. This psychological balance is a key element of the moral factors referred to above. Another key element of those moral factors is the personality of the individual making the decisions. While Hart touches upon the personality of various commanders throughout history, nowhere does he delve into great detail, as this is not the focus of his argument.

However, it seems to this author that there is significant value to be gained from an examination of the personalities of the commanders during these same decisive campaigns. Decision making is an intensely personal process, and all decisions are

shaped by the decision maker's personality. This basic axiom holds true whether the individual in question is deciding what to order for dinner or which island to invade next in the campaigns against Japan in the Pacific.

This thesis will not attempt nearly so ambitious a study as Hart's; however, a detailed examination of the manner in which two decisive campaigns--conducted in parallel--were influenced by the personalities of those in command provides valuable insight. Even if it is impossible to remove the influence of personality upon strategic decision making, a deeper understanding of personality's effect may help future leaders to better execute their responsibilities. The two campaigns that will be examined are the concurrent drives across the Southwest and Central Pacific against Imperial Japan in the Second World War.

In order to examine the effect of personality on the strategic decisions that shaped these two campaigns, certain assumptions about personality have been made. These assumptions are discussed in greater detail below; however, the key assumption is this. Certain individuals appear to carry personality traits that allow them to dominate decision-making processes with which they are involved, even when their formal authority does not give them this influence. For the purpose of this thesis, such individuals are said to have a "dominant personality." The essential elements of such a personality--confidence, tenacity, and competence--will be elaborated upon below.

Both campaigns in the Pacific been extensively examined over the past half-century. The majority of this analysis has concentrated upon the tactical execution of battles within the campaigns, with less emphasis on the strategic decision making along

the way. The analysis that has keyed on the strategy involved has often focused on the unique divided command structure.

This structure and its genesis will be discussed at some length below, but a brief explanation is necessary to frame the research question. The primary Allied efforts in the Pacific War were prosecuted along two axes, within two independent theaters under the direction of theater commanders, General Douglas MacArthur in Australia and Admiral Chester Nimitz in Hawaii. MacArthur and Nimitz each reported directly to the chief of their respective service in Washington. General George Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army, allowed MacArthur considerable freedom and generally supported his strategic recommendations, essentially allowing MacArthur to run the war in his theater as he saw fit. On the other hand, Admiral Ernest King, Chief of Naval Operations and Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, took a much more personal interest in Pacific strategy and essentially dictated the course of operations to Nimitz. Therefore the two men who really shaped Allied strategy in the Pacific were MacArthur and King.² The actual dynamics of decision making were, of course, much more complicated than the above statement suggests. Both Marshall and Nimitz retained significant influence by virtue of their positions, yet the real driving forces--the true dominant personalities--appear to have been MacArthur and King.

The vast scale of the theater and the tremendous resources directed toward Japan's defeat, coupled with this ungainly command structure, compelled strategists in Washington to hash out significant and well-documented decisions on a regular basis. This plethora of meaningful strategic decisions, coupled with the dominant personalities

of two men primarily directing the course of the war, yields a highly illuminating case study in the influence of personality on strategy.

The primary question that this thesis will address is thus: How did the dominant personalities of General MacArthur and Admiral King shape Allied strategy against Japan during the Second World War? From this question three subordinate questions can be derived. First, what evidence is there that MacArthur and King possessed dominant personalities? Second, which significant decisions reflect the impact of one or both of these dominant personalities? Finally, what was the overall effect on Allied strategy from these personalities shaping these decisions?

At this point a few more definitions are required. For the purposes of this thesis, the term “personality” will be defined to include three intertwined elements. The first element consists of the essential character traits of the person in question, such as courage, impatience, tact, charisma, and creativity. The second is made up of the sum total of all the biases, stereotypes, and prejudgments a person has accumulated over the course of his or her life. Finally, personality includes the personal and institutional agendas, both conscious and subconscious, that each individual brings to a decision, such as a desire to protect and improve the reputation of the military branch that he or she serves. All three of these elements are interrelated and are assumed to be coherent in most people. In other words, a proud person is likely to be more inclined to take steps to protect the reputation of an institution with which he or she is associated and therefore also more likely to regard individuals from competing institutions with suspicion or even contempt.

From this definition of personality the concept of “dominant personality” is developed. When an individual is endowed with aggressive self-confidence, unshakable tenacity, and practical intelligence and expertise, they seem to dominate those around them. These three essential ingredients then combine to produce other characteristics. The blending of supreme confidence and professional competence seems to produce a calculated audacity that generally achieves success. However, when tenacity to the point of obstinacy is added to the mix the audacity is no longer calculated and it becomes blind audacity--which still may lead to success if lucky but may also lead to disaster. Fortunately, the obstinacy generally does not enter the equation unless the dominant personality is challenged in the attempt to shape the decision-making process. Therefore, such individuals generally succeed and rise naturally to leadership roles. Since their confidence generally contributes to their ambition, these individuals seem to view such authority as their natural right. In addition this dominance is generally apparent from an early age. A brief vignette illustrates the point.

In his memoirs, MacArthur recalls that General Pershing, commanding United States forces in Europe at the time, offered him the following encouragement during a difficult period, “We old First Captains, Douglas, must never flinch.”³ The term “First Captain” denotes the individual holding the senior position within the cadet rank structure at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Both Pershing and MacArthur had achieved that position within their respective classes, proving themselves leaders among future leaders. King reached the equivalent position at the Naval Academy as well. Since such authority is coveted, the competition for these billets is generally fierce. Success in struggle seems to clearly reflect the dominance that such individuals often

show throughout their career. Such is certainly the case with MacArthur and King. Furthermore, the ability to “never flinch” is arguably the essential characteristic of a dominant personality.

Full details of the political and military considerations which resulted in the division of command responsibilities in the Pacific between General MacArthur--assigned Supreme Allied Commander, Southwest Pacific Area (SACSWPA)--and Admiral Nimitz--assigned Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas⁴ (CINCPOA)--are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, some background is necessary to further define the primary research question.

The precise reasons behind President Roosevelt’s decision to divide the Pacific into two separate--and ostensibly equal--theaters will never be known for certain. However, historians generally agree that it was a compromise solution to the difficult situation the President had to face in early 1942. General Douglas MacArthur, recalled to active duty in mid-1941 as Commander United States Army Forces in the Far East,⁵ was by far the senior flag officer in the Pacific. However, following his evacuation from the Corregidor to Australia in March 1942, he found himself a commander without a command. One solution might have been to appoint him as overall commander of the entire Pacific theater, and this seems to be what MacArthur himself expected.⁶ However, at this point the Navy leadership in general and Admiral King in particular were still angered and embarrassed by the debacle at Pearl Harbor; and they considered a naval defeat of Japan as essential revenge and vindication.⁷ This desire for a Navy-led campaign against Japan only reinforced the service’s traditional view of the Pacific as a naval theater by its very nature. Therefore the idea of placing an Army officer in overall

command was simply unacceptable to the Navy and its political supporters.⁸ These conflicting institutional and personal interests left the president with little choice but to take the militarily questionable but politically sound course of splitting the theater.

In order to evaluate the effects that the dominant personalities of MacArthur and King had upon strategic decisions, it is necessary to address each of the subordinate questions in turn. First, this thesis will demonstrate that each man possessed each of the three essential characteristics of a dominant personality--confidence, tenacity, and competence. The primary method of illustrating this point will be a careful examination of the available biographic material on each. In MacArthur's case several complete biographies exist in addition to his illuminating autobiography. While King's life is not nearly as well chronicled, there is one well-respected and complete biography in addition to his autobiography. Details of these publications will be discussed in chapter 2. An examination of this material clearly shows that the essential characteristics of each man remained remarkably consistent throughout their lives and ample evidence of their dominant personality can be found.

Once the dominant personalities of MacArthur and King have been established, the next step is to examine the impact these personalities had upon major strategic decisions. In order to allow sufficient depth of examination while keeping the overall topic manageable, only three key choices will be analyzed. These decisions have been chosen both for their overall impact upon the course of the war and because they clearly appear to reflect the impact of one or more dominant personalities.

Furthermore, the dominant personalities of MacArthur and King impacted each decision in a different manner. In the first case there was a single dominant personality

acting essentially unopposed. In the second two dominant personalities acted in parallel competition toward the same goal. The final case was one of two dominant personalities set on achieving mutually exclusive goals.

The earliest decision looked at will be the decision to begin offensive raids against Japan in the spring of 1942. The most significant of these raids was the bombing raid on Tokyo led by Army Air Corps Lieutenant Colonel Doolittle, but other raids were conducted during the same time period as well. The effects of these relatively harmless attacks were significant far beyond their immediate military value. The second decision examined will be the initiation of significant offensive operations against Japan with the invasion of Guadalcanal. This choice had significant military impact in both the short and long term. Finally, this thesis will scrutinize the ongoing competition between the Central and Southwest Pacific drives for primacy which culminated with the decision--reached late in 1944--to invade Luzon Island in the Philippines rather than Formosa (Taiwan). This was perhaps the most significant and hard-fought decision reached during the war in the Pacific.

Each of these choices was controversial at the time, and this thesis will demonstrate that none could likely have been reached had it not been for the influence of the dominant personalities of either or both MacArthur and King. The first two went directly against the letter and spirit of the "Germany First" policy that the Allies had agreed upon before the war and reconfirmed after America joined the fight.⁹ The last decision ultimately went against existing war plans and against conventional strategic wisdom in Washington throughout the early years of the war.¹⁰ Each of these decisions will now be further defined and briefly placed in context.

In early 1942 the Japanese appeared nearly unstoppable. They had conquered every objective they had attempted. Along the way, they had been slowed only slightly by resistance in the Philippines and checked not at all elsewhere. Furthermore, President Roosevelt at the ARCADIA Conference confirmed to Prime Minister Churchill that the United States remained committed to the previously agreed upon policy of defeating Germany first, while conducting only minimum defensive operations in other theaters.¹¹ This pledge alleviated Churchill's fears that American priorities might have shifted because of the "sneak" attack on Pearl Harbor.¹² While Admiral King fully backed the President on the desirability of defeating Germany first, both he and Roosevelt wished to begin offensive operations against Japan as soon as possible.

Therefore, King began pressing Nimitz, in January 1942, to begin carrier-launched air raids upon the Gilbert and Marshall Islands as soon as possible.¹³ Following these raids, King himself gave the order that led to air strikes from the carriers *Yorktown* and *Lexington* against Japanese transport ships in harbors of Lae and Salamaua in eastern New Guinea in March. While the damage inflicted was relatively minor, it was sufficient to cause Japanese forces in the area to pause offensive operations while awaiting additional air cover.¹⁴

The last of these initial carrier raids had the greatest long-term effect. On 18 April 1942, sixteen U.S. Army Air Corps B-25 bombers launched from the aircraft carrier *Hornet* attacked Tokyo. While the military damage was slight, the psychological impact was enormous. American morale was boosted, Japanese confidence was severely shaken, and decisive defeat of the U.S. fleet became an overwhelming priority to Japanese naval

planners. This priority in turn led directly to the attack on Midway Island that ended in a disastrous defeat, from which the Japanese never recovered.¹⁵

The next key decision was to initiate significant offensive operations against Japan. By the summer of 1942, the Japanese advance down the Solomon Islands was clearly perceived as a serious threat to the Allied lines of communication to Australia and New Zealand. In response to the threat and after significant wrangling between MacArthur and King, the Joint Chiefs of Staff devised a three-phased plan to capture the Japanese fortress of Rabaul and halt the advance. The first phase, known as “Task One,” was the invasion of the islands of Tulagi and Guadalcanal in the southern Solomons.¹⁶ This shift to offensive operations marked a significant break from the “Germany First” policy and could be justified only by the necessity of securing the vital lines of communication. Operation Watchtower was initiated on 7 August 1942 with landing on Guadalcanal and Tulagi. Despite initial Allied success, fighting would continue to drain men and materiel from both sides at an entirely unanticipated rate until the Japanese finally abandoned Guadalcanal during the first week of February 1943.

The last significant decision to be examined is the choice to invade Luzon instead of Formosa, a decision which was only reached after long and bitter debate. This was arguably the most significant choice in terms of shaping the direction of the war, and it was certainly one of the most hotly debated issues of the war. Prewar strategy, under first the “Orange” series of plans and then the “Rainbow” series, had been built around a drive across the Pacific to reinforce the Philippine Islands. Most naval planners expected to be forced to recapture vice reinforce the islands, as they did not believe the Army garrison would be able to hold out for the six months required. However, for political reasons the

actual plans never reflected this belief.¹⁷ Thus General MacArthur was justified--at least on paper--in his oft-expressed confidence that relief was on the way while defending the islands in 1942.

However, following the disaster at Pearl Harbor and in the face of Japanese success across the Pacific, executing such a drive to relieve the islands was never seriously considered.¹⁸ From that point forward, interest among Navy planners in attacking the Philippines fell to near zero as Admiral King shifted their focus toward Formosa. Army and Army Air Corps planners also looked upon Formosa as a more effective base from which to attack Japan than the Philippines.¹⁹ On the other hand, General MacArthur's focus on fulfilling his promise to return to the islands never wavered. The Navy's semiofficial historian Samuel Elliot Morrison best captured this view when he commented that, "To General MacArthur, it appeared as monstrous to defeat Japan before liberating the Philippines, as it would have to General De Gaulle to defeat Germany before liberating France."²⁰ Thus, the stage was set for a direct clash between MacArthur and King. The Joint Chiefs of Staff began to consider the question of Luzon versus Formosa early in 1943, but the issue was not finally resolved until October 1944.²¹ When Admiral King finally relented due to the overwhelming logistical problems involved with invading Formosa first--particularly after the early capture of Leyte Island, he was essentially the last advocate of the Formosa approach.²² His resistance to growing support for attacking Luzon first is all the more striking, considering that his boss--President Roosevelt--and his theater commander--Admiral Nimitz--had both apparently endorsed that approach after meeting with MacArthur in

Pearl Harbor in July.²³ In the end, the invasion of the Luzon was a success and Formosa was bypassed.

Each of the above decisions and the circumstances surrounding them will be examined in greater detail in chapter 4. Also in chapter 4, the influence of the dominant personalities of MacArthur and King upon each will be illustrated. During the course of this examination, the third subordinate question will be addressed as well. In each case the net effect of the decision will be evaluated in the context of the overall Allied effort in the Pacific.

These results will be compiled, summarized, and evaluated in chapter 5. This chapter will also include some topics for further research, some value judgments regarding the influence of personality on strategy, and some recommendations for future commanders.

1. B. H. Liddell Hart. *Strategy*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1967), 24.

2. Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 146; and Thomas B. Buell, *Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1980), 361.

3. Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: Da Capo, 1964), 47.

4. Nimitz's Area of Responsibility was originally designated as the Pacific Ocean Area, but after it was divided into North, Central, and South Pacific subareas it was commonly referred to as Pacific Ocean Areas. The latter terminology will be used throughout this thesis.

5. MacArthur, 109.

6. William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880-1964* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 267.

7. Buell, 190.

8. Spector, 144.
9. Ibid., 123.
10. Ibid., 418-9.
11. Louis Morton, "Germany First," in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Greenfield (Washington: United States Army Center of Military History, 1987), 47.
12. Spector, 123.
13. Buell, 172.
14. Spector, 150-1.
15. Ibid., 153-5.
16. Ibid., 186.
17. Ibid., 59
18. Robert Smith, "Luzon Versus Formosa," in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Greenfield (Washington: United States Army Center of Military History, 1987), 461.
19. Spector, 419.
20. Samuel Morison, *Strategy and Compromise* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), 99.
21. Smith, 477.
22. Spector, 419; and Smith, 475.
23. Spector, 418.

CHAPTER 2

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

There appears to be little or no literature that directly addresses the primary research question of how the dominant personalities of General MacArthur and Admiral King shaped Allied strategy against Japan during the Second World War. However, there are reasonably significant bodies of work addressing three areas related to this question, namely: the personality of MacArthur and King, the impact of personality on strategy and decision making, and Allied strategy against Japan.

Information on the personalities of MacArthur and King is best found in the biographies covering each man's life. Since both had a significant impact on the world stage, their lives are well chronicled--the former far more than the latter, but King still adequately so. Each man published a fairly complete autobiography and each is the subject of numerous biographical articles and at least one complete biography. In MacArthur's case there are so many complete biographies extant that the challenge becomes one of filtering through all the information provided.

This thesis has relied almost exclusively upon the first two volumes of *The Years of MacArthur* by D. Clayton James, a masterful work that appears to be both the most comprehensive and least biased of the major biographies. As James notes in his foreword, in most other works MacArthur "has been [either] extravagantly praised or severely censured," with few maintaining their objectivity.¹ James devotes a good deal of effort toward analyzing MacArthur's personality, emphasizing the role his ancestors had in its formation. He devotes fully forty-four pages to discussing Douglas's grandfather, father, and brother. Several recurring themes, such as audacity and vanity,

are clearly illustrated throughout MacArthur's life as well. From this work much of the evidence of MacArthur's dominant personality was drawn.

Other biographies seem to have little to add, with one notable exception. Carol Morris Petillo examines MacArthur's life from a significantly different perspective in *Douglas MacArthur: The Philippine Years*. With unprecedented access to Philippine government documents and records, Petillo dissects the general's life from a Philippine perspective and offers some interesting insights from this unique point of view. This work also includes a great deal of discussion of MacArthur's personality; however, Petillo's observations seemed heavily based in clinical psychology and were thus of lesser value. In MacArthur's autobiography, *Reminiscences*, little mention is made of personality--hardly surprising since such discussion would not likely be flattering--but the MacArthur heritage is discussed at some length. As mentioned above, the most revealing aspect of this autobiography tends to be what is left out rather than what is included.

King, despite his impact on the war, received far less publicity during and after the conflict, and his biographical coverage is scant as well. Students of history are thus fortunate that the single complete biography of the King is very well done. Thomas Buell, an active duty naval officer, did an admirable job of covering King's life and capturing his character in *Master of Sea Power*. While this single volume work is not nearly as comprehensive as James's coverage of MacArthur, it covers all the significant events in King's life and clearly shows the consistency of his personality throughout. King's autobiography is refreshingly frank and exhaustively complete; therefore, it is a

valuable source in its own right. Such memoirs could probably have been expected from a man who seemed to care little for the feelings of those around him.

The second body of literature related to the primary question consists of a loose grouping of works covering various aspects of personality, command, and decision making. Contemporary military writers seem to shy away from the concept of personality, as few journal articles or recent books devote much attention to the subject. There are likely two reasons for this aversion. First of all, discussion of any given individual's personality is unlikely to be without fault, risking the perception that the work is an unprofessional personal attack. Secondly, most articles in military journals seem to be prescriptive--the author presents a problem and a recommended solution; since personality is generally viewed as a fixed characteristic, there is danger of presenting an insoluble problem. Academic journals, particularly those in the fields of psychology and psychiatry, contain a plethora of articles on personality. While some of these articles address personality's impact on decision making, the decisions discussed are usually personal and small scale vice strategic and large scale.

Most history books mention personality only in passing, if at all. The volume of the West Point History Series covering the Pacific war is a good example. It devotes a few short paragraphs to profiling Army leaders, describing Marshall as "the team player, calm, retiring, diplomatic," and MacArthur as "dramatic, aloof, imperious, brilliant."² No evidence is presented as a basis for these descriptions, although other sources indicate they are generally accurate. Ronald Spector's *Eagle Against the Sun* is a significant exception to this rule. This single volume summary of the war in the Pacific contains an extensive discussion of the personalities of the key players. Not only are characteristics

of Nimitz, MacArthur, Marshall, and King thoroughly recounted, but those of their subordinates are discussed as well. Spector's analysis of Allied strategy is also masterful and will be covered below.

Writers in the past have given greater weight to personality and its impact. As mentioned above, B. H. Liddell Hart discusses famous individuals extensively throughout the course of his historical survey, *Strategy*. Yet his point is always to show that they were successful when they adopted the "indirect approach" and unsuccessful when they did not. He demonstrates that certain individuals chose this approach more consistently than others and were thus more consistently successful in their campaigns; but he goes no further into the personality of his subjects. On the other hand, the oft-quoted, seldom-read German military philosopher, Carl von Clausewitz devotes an entire chapter of *On War* to the concept of "Genius for War." His essential point is that certain individuals are born with a natural ability to excel at warfare, much as others are born with the ability to play a musical instrument well. According to Clausewitz such individuals possess distinctive characteristics, including courage, intelligence, and strength of will.³ These characteristics are very similar to those this thesis has labeled as a dominant personality. Alfred Thayer Mahan--a widely read Naval philosopher whose influence will be discussed in chapter 4--also devoted some effort to examining personality. His biographical articles on famous British admirals of the eighteenth century were compiled under the title, *Types of Naval Officers*, which incidentally was one of Admiral King's favorite books.⁴

The third broad category of literature that relates to the thesis question includes the numerous works focusing on Allied strategy in the Pacific. The two most important

works, and the foundation for most of the others, are the Army's official history of the war and the Navy's quasi-official account. Louis Morton authored the key volumes of the Army's account in this case, including one complete book devoted to Allied and Japanese strategy through the end of 1943. The Navy's version of events was compiled by Samuel Eliot Morison while on active duty but published by a private company, thus its quasi-official nature. Despite this caveat, Morison's works draw from official Allied and Japanese records and are generally considered authoritative. Each author provides detailed accounts of Allied planning and strategic decisions throughout the war and each proved an invaluable source to this thesis.

One other quasi-official history also proved of great value. Lieutenant Grace Hayes was assigned to the Joint Chiefs of Staff historical section in 1946 and tasked with compiling an account of the Joint Chiefs involvement in the war against Japan. Her history was produced with full access to the records of the Chiefs and classified secret upon its completion in 1953. It was declassified eighteen years later and published as *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II: The War Against Japan* by a private company in 1982. With such complete access this work provides remarkable insights into strategic decision making at the national level.

As mentioned earlier Spector's *Eagle Against the Sun* also contains extensive discussions of Allied strategy and the impact of key decisions. H. P. Willmott produced two volumes on strategy in the Pacific that were also very useful. In *Empires in the Balance* and *The Barrier and the Javelin*, Willmott exhaustively examines the strategy of both sides leading up to the war and during the first year of conflict. Meticulously

combing through records from Japan and the Allies, he clearly demonstrates how each side's perceptions of the other shaped the decision-making process.

In summary, the personalities of MacArthur and King are well documented as is the Allied strategy in the Pacific. However works specifically linking the personalities of the two men to this strategy are rare, as are discussions of personality's impact on strategy in general.

1. D. Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur: Volume I 1880-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), vii.

2. John H. Bradley and Jack W. Dice. *The Second World War: Asia and the Pacific* (Wayne, NJ: Avery Publishing Group, 1989), 25.

3. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. J. J. Graham (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1908; reprint, ed. Anatol Rapoport, London: Penguin Books, 1968), 140-152.

4. Thomas B. Buell, *Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Fleet Admiral J. Ernest King* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1980), 53.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS: PERSONALITY

The essential personality characteristics that would shape the decisions of both General MacArthur and Admiral King during the Second World War were clearly evident in each from a young age. Careful examination of each man's childhood serves not only to illuminate many of the influences that shaped their personalities and outlook, but also highlights traits and tendencies that will remain remarkably consistent throughout their lives. Further scrutiny of each man's life and military career before, during, and after the First World War reveals the continued influence of these characteristics on their decision making.

These essential characteristics were remarkably similar in both men. Each was confident to the point of arrogance, tenacious to the point of obstinacy, and possessed practical intelligence bordering on genius. These three traits, mixed with a good deal of vanity, a keen sense of honor, and driving ambition, allowed both men to dominate those around them throughout their lives. While the personalities of MacArthur and King were certainly not identical, they were similar enough to both be assigned the label "dominant personality." This term, as defined earlier, simply indicates the character traits of an individual who over time is able to dominate the decision-making processes with which he or she is involved, with or without the formal authority to do so.

As this chapter explores the primary influences, key events, and illustrative decisions of MacArthur and King, remarkable parallels between their lives become apparent. While the purpose of this chapter is not to compare the two men, they were of a similar age--King was about fourteen months older--and pursued similar ambitions

against the same historical background; therefore, a parallel chronological examination of their lives provides a useful framework. As this examination proceeds some striking similarities are revealed. Each boy's father was a man of strong personality traits who had a profound influence on his son's life. Both boys recognized a military academy as a goal at a relatively young age and followed this realization with relentless pursuit of that goal. MacArthur and King each achieved marked success at their respective academies, followed by early careers that failed to live up to the promise shown in school. Each man then recovered and found steady success, followed by a decline in influence before the start of the Second World War. As mentioned, illumination of the similarities between the two men is not the primary purpose of this examination; however, there is certainly value in demonstrating the manner in which similar influences produced similar effects.

The United States was experiencing a period of great transformation in the late nineteenth century; this was the period of "Manifest Destiny" and the pacification--perhaps more accurately elimination--of the Western frontier. During this same time frame, America began to flex its economic and military power on the world's stage, culminating at the turn of the century with the Spanish-American War. All of these trends and influences, to a greater or lesser extent, shaped the early lives of Douglas MacArthur and Ernest King.

However, before examining the childhood periods of these two men, it is worthwhile to study their immediate ancestors--who were also shaped by the turbulent years of the nineteenth century. Such a study proves worthwhile as both men were deeply shaped by their fathers' influence and that of other relatives as well. This is particularly true in MacArthur's case, as he seems to have spent much of his early life

almost literally in his father's shadow. In fact D. Clayton James, MacArthur's most comprehensive biographer, entitled Part One of his chronicle "In the Shadow of His Father."¹ While King's father left no heroic reputation hanging over his head, he did have an unusual amount of influence over Ernest's upbringing and clearly stamped his character upon the boy.

MacArthur clearly illustrates the influence that he felt that his family had upon him and the standards that he was expected to meet in the second sentence of his memoirs, when he invokes familial links to the "heroic lore of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table."² His grandfather, Arthur MacArthur Sr., went from youthful immigrant to successful lawyer in less than twenty years, and by the time Douglas was born he was serving as an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia. James sums up the lessons that Douglas learned from his grandfather as follows, "A MacArthur, by virtue of his family's high rank in the Scottish aristocracy of blood and the American aristocracy of success and wealth, is obligated to conduct himself with honor, gallantry, and magnanimity."³ While his grandson may or may not have always lived up to these lofty goals, this family philosophy clearly shaped him throughout his life.

Douglas's father, Arthur MacArthur Jr., was a genuine war hero and a regimental commander before he was old enough to vote. Volunteering to serve in a Wisconsin regiment in the Civil War, he quickly rose through the ranks through gallantry and competence. At the end of the war, the "boy colonel" of twenty years was in command of his regiment and a nationally publicized hero. However, by the time his third son was born fifteen years later he had risen only to the rank of captain in the regular Army.

Douglas's early years were spent on a series of desolate frontier posts in the undersized and poorly funded postwar army. Despite this slow pace, Arthur Jr. was an extremely competent and persistent officer and he would eventually regain his colonelcy and more, ultimately retiring in 1909 as a lieutenant general--the Army's highest peacetime rank at the time. Thus his father's early heroism and later success served as a benchmark for Douglas to strive for and eventually surpass. On the other hand, Arthur Jr. was not without his flaws. Even though he retired as the highest ranking officer in the army, he never achieved his goal of Chief of Staff of the Army and retired "deeply hurt and chagrined" because he had not.⁴ This shortfall was apparently because of two qualities, which incidentally would prove not entirely absent from his son in future years, "disdain and contempt for civilian officials who interfered in what he considered to be his domain, and . . . outspokenness on matters beyond his jurisdiction."⁵

James King was also a young immigrant from Scotland, although that is where the parallels with Arthur MacArthur Sr. end. James King was a blue-collar man through and through. He certainly had no great vision of family glory and likely had no use for aristocrats--hereditary or wealthy--living in the most radical Republican county in Ohio.⁶ After arriving in the United States as a child, James grew up in Cleveland and then worked various jobs throughout Ohio, finally settling down in railroad maintenance. James had even more influence on Ernest's development than was usual for that period. As Ernest was growing up he was fascinated with the rail yards and machine shops where his father worked and spent a great deal of time there; more significantly, just as Ernest started high school his mother fell ill and moved away to live with family until she died. His younger brothers and sister went with their mother, but Ernest lived with his father

throughout high school. King acknowledged in his autobiography, that “Ernest was perhaps unusually close to his father during these years.”⁷ This closeness is significant because a number of his father’s characteristics can be seen in King. One particular incident is illustrative.

Following grammar school, Ernest announced his intention to quit school and find a job. His father agreed under the condition that he continue this course for at least one year once embarked. When Ernest hinted the next autumn that he would like to return to school his words fell on deaf ears. Later that fall the company at which he was employed folded. His father would still not allow him to return to school, forcing him to seek employment elsewhere. When this proved impossible, his father arranged a job for Ernest at his own yard under the condition that as the foreman’s son he would be expected to work harder than anyone else. After one year Ernest resumed his schooling. Recalling the incident he dryly notes, “The boy’s whims and vicissitudes were not coddled by his father.”⁸

The early childhood of each boy was relatively unremarkable. As mentioned above MacArthur spent his early years on desolate frontier posts, mainly in the Southwest, as his father worked his way up through the peacetime army. King grew up moving around Ohio as his father worked to support the booming rail industry.

The first memory that MacArthur records in *Reminiscences* is “trudg(ing) . . . at the head of the column” with the first sergeant during his family’s move from one corner of New Mexico to another.⁹ While it is unlikely that a four-year-old kept pace at the head of the column for very long, his close association with the soldiers under his father’s command marks the beginning of a theme he will return to often as he describes his early

life. It is an axiom within the American military that the best way for young officers to learn is to stop talking and listen to the senior noncommissioned officers nominally under their command. MacArthur seems to have extended this process, at least in retrospect, to the practical education of officer's children as well.

King's early childhood was marked by only one incident worth highlighting. When he was about seven, Ernest was served pie that had been overly seasoned while the family was dining at a friend's house. He expressed his disapproval to the hostess and was scolded by his mother. Recalling the incident in later years he remarked, "If I didn't agree, I said so."¹⁰ This conviction in his beliefs, when prudence might have counseled otherwise, would prove a dominant characteristic throughout his life.

Each man's childhood can be divided at the point where they began to seriously pursue a career as a military officer. While MacArthur probably envisioned himself growing up to be a soldier from a very young age, it does not seem that he really grasped the steps he would have to take in order to obtain a commission. He describes himself as a "poor student" when his father was stationed in Kansas and only an "average student" when they moved to Washington, DC.¹¹ However, when he was thirteen years old his father was ordered to Fort Sam Houston, and Douglas enrolled at the newly founded West Texas Military Academy. While he does not mark this point as the beginning of his drive to gain admittance to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the remarkable academic transformation which he executed was vital to his later admission. In four years at the West Texas Military Academy, MacArthur average grade was 96.6 out of 100. He also excelled at athletics serving as quarterback of the football team and captain of the baseball team during his senior year. Both teams were unbeaten.¹² Despite this

impressive performance and an extensive letter writing campaign on his behalf, Douglas did not gain one of the four presidential appointments available in either 1897 or 1898. However, he remained determined to gain admission and spent the year after graduation living at a hotel in Milwaukee with his mother and studying for the upcoming competitive examination for appointment from Wisconsin's Fourth Congressional District. The hard work paid off and he won the slot by a wide margin. The lesson that he took away was, "Preparedness is the key to success and victory."¹³

King's decision to seek appointment to the Naval Academy at Annapolis was sparked by an article on the academy in the popular boy's magazine *Youth Companion*. After reading this article when he was ten years old, Ernest told his father he would like to attend the academy. Although his father had no military experience, he had spent some time working as a seaman on the Great Lakes and he approved of the idea.¹⁴ There is no indication that this ambition sparked a transformation in King's schoolwork as it had with MacArthur. Ernest seems to have been a good student from the first. However, King's performance in high school, where he scored high marks and graduated valedictorian, and his intense preparation for the competitive examination in Ohio bear a striking similarity to MacArthur's. To gain admission to the academy King was forced to compete for the only spot available in Ohio the year he graduated, as Senators did not yet have the ability to issue appointments and Representatives received only one appointment every six years.¹⁵ King's single-minded determination in running down that single appointment was similar to that of MacArthur and would remain a defining personality characteristic down through the years.

Both men achieved significant academic and military success at their respective academies. This is hardly surprising given the characteristics that each had displayed to this point and the future successes that would await. However, neither man could be accurately described as a model cadet--the term midshipman had not yet been adopted--in every way. Each displayed an arrogance and obstinacy that probably would not have been tolerated in cadets of lesser abilities.

Many of the influences and characteristics essential to McArthur's personality are reflected in the comments of his academy roommate from his first year. This roommate recalls that Douglas stayed up until the lights went out every night studying and was often up an hour before reveille to study further with the clear goal, in the roommate's eyes, of graduating number one in his class. MacArthur apparently spoke often of his father and felt "deeply obligated" to be a worthy successor of the general.¹⁶ Despite this intense drive to achieve the top slot, MacArthur's pride nearly got the better of him in one instance.

Near the end of his second year, as MacArthur was on track to finish first in his class as he had the first year, he found himself required to take a math examination from which he expected to be exempt. Rather than take the examination, which he could likely have completed easily, MacArthur stormed off to confront the instructor in question, a lieutenant colonel. The instructor explained that because Douglas has missed several quizzes while ill, policy required him to take the final examination despite his high academic standing. MacArthur boldly informed the instructor that he should have been allowed to make up the quizzes instead and that he would not be present at the examination. Receiving no response, MacArthur saluted and left. According to his

roommate at the time, Douglas had an announced intention to resign if he was not excused from the exam. Ten minutes before exam time he was excused.¹⁷ While it is far from certain that MacArthur would have made good on his threat to resign, simply confronting his instructor in this fashion was extremely risky and could easily have jeopardized his hard-fought goal of graduating first in his class. This incident clearly displays the arrogance and stubbornness, which are essential elements of a dominant personality. As discussed in chapter 1, this dominant personality was ultimately recognized with MacArthur's selection as First Captain during his final year.

Not surprisingly *Reminiscences* contains no mention of the incident above. In fact his memoirs spend only three brief pages on the four years at West Point. The section ends with a curious discussion of his academic achievements. He mentions that he compiled the best academic record in twenty-five years and then claims to be baffled by this accomplishment. His statement that he "studied no longer or harder than others" is in direct contradiction to his roommate's account above and the latter's claim seems more credible based upon the result.¹⁸ The entire section smacks of a false modesty, a characteristic which will be seen again.

Ernest King, perhaps with more a practical blue-collar perception of the world, decided that graduating first in his class at Annapolis would likely bring him too much attention. He decided that being third or fourth would bring the right balance of prestige and anonymity.¹⁹ He would eventually graduate fourth. But King's dominant personality would also be recognized and, like MacArthur, he would reach the pinnacle of cadet rank his final year. One significant difference between the experiences of the two men occurred because King started school two years earlier and was thus at the academy when

the Spanish-American War began in April 1898. The eldest class was graduated early and sent to sea immediately in support of the war, and the next class--due to graduate in June 1899--was also sent to sea for the summer. However the two younger classes were told to go home early for the summer and return to Annapolis in the fall. King, with the help of a friend's father, managed to obtain orders to the cruiser *San Francisco* for the duration of the conflict. On board he got his first exposure to the "real Navy" and even briefly saw combat off Cuba.²⁰ One incident occurred during this time that is worth recounting.

While assigned as boat officer on one of the ship's small boats, King was directed to stop at the cruiser *Dixie* before returning to *San Francisco*. Not wishing to turn around twice, he directed the coxswain to come alongside bow to stern against custom and procedures. The coxswain demurred but King insisted. As he came aboard the *Dixie* the executive officer, Lieutenant Hugo Osterhaus, reprimanded him for the breach.²¹ Osterhaus would eventually rise to command the Atlantic Fleet, and despite this inauspicious start, King would work for him on three occasions during his career. This is the first instance where King's arrogance could have caused real damage to his career but apparently did not. In the autumn he returned to the academy and resumed his studies.

Although King was generally well liked by both his classmates and instructors, his arrogance and stubbornness led him, on at least one occasion, to clash with the faculty much as MacArthur had. During his second year there was a disturbance one night in the barracks. The duty officer had all the cadets assemble outside in their sleeping attire to reprimand them. As they were in formation, one of the cadets in a rear rank began practicing the art of ventriloquism and King--in the first rank--began to laugh. The duty

officer thoroughly scolded Cadet King at the time and called him to his office the next day as well. When the duty officer, a lieutenant commander, told King that he was thinking about placing him upon report, King replied that he would not be able to make such a report “stick.” In King’s words, “This irked the duty officer some more and he really sounded off and promised that King would ‘get the gate.’”²² However, King stood his ground and in the end nothing came of the incident. King’s willingness to stand his ground when he believed he was in the right--no matter the risk--would jeopardize his career again and again.

Thus, the academy experiences of the two men were remarkably similar in many respects. Both demonstrated the same intellectual abilities and dedication that they had shown in achieving their appointments to achieve their personal goals at the academy. Each displayed sufficient military prowess to rise through the cadet ranks to the top. Likewise, both men were willing to risk all this hard work by confronting a senior officer when they felt they were in the right.

Given their strenuous efforts to gain entry into their respective schools and their stellar performances while enrolled, one might reasonably expect that the early commissioned careers of MacArthur and King would shine equally as bright. This was not the case. Both men ran into trouble early on that could well have ended their military careers before they really started. The root cause in both cases can be traced back to an essential arrogance and lack of judgment.

As top graduate, MacArthur was able to choose his branch upon commissioning. Like most of the top of his class he chose the Corps of Engineers. After two months on leave with his family in San Francisco, he departed for his first assignment in the

Philippine Islands. MacArthur arrived in Manila in October 1903, approximately two years after his father completed his very successful tour as Military Governor of the Philippines. Douglas apparently performed his duties well enough and received positive efficiency reports from his commander.²³ However, it does not appear that those duties were particularly demanding, and he had plenty of time to socialize. He recalls dinner one night with Captain James Hubbard and two recently graduated Philippine law students Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmana.²⁴ MacArthur would have further contact with all three in their roles as Chief of Staff of the American Expeditionary Force during World War I and the first two presidents of the Philippine Commonwealth respectively. MacArthur departed the Philippines after only one year due to medical problems but the emotional attachment to the islands initially sparked by his father's successes had now been reinforced by his own positive experience there.

Following his return to the United States and a brief convalescence, MacArthur resumed his engineering duties in San Francisco, where his mother and father continued to reside. While he likely requested assignment in the same locality as his parents, it did not prove to be an effective arrangement in the long run. After a reasonably good start, MacArthur began to annoy his seniors by begging off assignments that interfered with his responsibility to his family and showing a marked lack of enthusiasm for the duties that he was willing to perform.²⁵ While the reasons behind this lapse are unclear, it seems possible that MacArthur's aristocratic view of his family's importance coupled with the extreme deference shown to his father as one of the Army's senior officers was behind his priority of effort at this stage. This view of his father's greatness--which in turn

contributed to his own arrogance--was likely enhanced further by Douglas's next assignment.

By 1904 Arthur MacArthur Jr. had ruffled enough feathers, particularly those of Secretary of War Taft, that his chances of achieving his goal of Chief of Staff of the Army had diminished to almost none.²⁶ It is not clear if he realized this at the time, but when he requested to be sent as an observer to the Russo-Japanese War it was likely seen as a good opportunity to get a trouble-making senior officer out of the press's eye.²⁷ Unfortunately for the general, the war ended before he reached the theater. However, when peace negotiations convened, he was assigned as a military attaché to the American legation in Tokyo. From there, with Taft's approval, he embarked on an extensive "reconnaissance" of East and South Asian military posts accompanied by his wife and an aide. His previous aide having been dismissed for reasons that were unclear even at the time, he requested that his son be assigned as his new aide just before he departed on this journey.²⁸

The MacArthur family departed Tokyo in November 1905 on a journey that would cover 19,949 miles and include visits to military bases in the current countries of Japan, China, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma), India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. At every stop along the way the family was treated in a fashion more appropriate to a visiting head of state than a military inspector. This was particularly true in Thailand--the only location that was not under the control of a colonial power at the time--where a member of the royal family coordinated the MacArthurs' visit and they dined with the king.²⁹ Douglas, as the general's son and "heir apparent," received the same treatment. This adventure no doubt further contributed to

his difficulty focusing on the mundane aspects of his engineering duties when he returned to the United States.

Shortly after his return, Douglas began classes at the Engineer School of Application in Washington, DC. This advanced school was considered a key career milestone for young engineers and MacArthur reached the school one year ahead of his classmates from West Point, despite the fact that he had as yet little practical engineering experience. Unfortunately for Douglas another distraction was also afforded to him shortly after arriving in Washington. At President Roosevelt's personal request, MacArthur was assigned additional duties as "an aide to assist at the White House functions."³⁰ The press of his duties on Pennsylvania Avenue apparently kept MacArthur from focusing on his course work. The report of the school commandant is particularly damning in light of MacArthur's previous academic achievements:

I am sorry to have to report that during this time [session of 1906-07] Lieutenant MacArthur seemed to take but little interest in his course at the School and that the character of the work done by him was generally not equal to that of most of the other student officers and barely exceeded the minimum which would have been permitted. . . . Indeed, throughout the time Lieutenant MacArthur was under my observation, he displayed, on the whole, but little professional zeal and his work was far inferior to that which his . . . record shows him to be capable of.³¹

Despite barely meeting the minimum standards, MacArthur completed the course and finally graduated in absentia while assigned to his next duty station. However, his performance at this next duty station would prove to be no great departure from his scholastic work. It is hardly surprising that MacArthur makes no mention of his troubles in school in *Reminiscences* and in fact mentions the school only in passing, but it is instructive that he devotes four paragraphs to his additional duties at the White House.³²

MacArthur had received orders, again likely at his request, to his family home of Milwaukee. His father had not yet retired but had received no additional assignment after returning from his reconnaissance trip. Therefore, Douglas's parents were also present in Milwaukee, and this would again prove a great distraction. MacArthur was assigned as assistant to the commander of the Engineering District in Milwaukee and quickly came into conflict with his boss by demanding special privileges in order to spend time with his parents.³³ The commander attempted to spark MacArthur's interest in his duties by assigning him to important duties away from Milwaukee, but Douglas fought this assignment every step of the way and eventually provoked his superior to report his intransigence to the Chief of Engineers in Washington. Shortly thereafter, Douglas was reassigned to Fort Leavenworth on orders signed by the Chief of Staff of the Army, an old family friend.³⁴ At this point in time MacArthur had been out of the academy for five years and had not yet had a truly successful assignment, furthermore the adverse comments on file from his seniors in California and Wisconsin placed his career in real jeopardy. While his lack of focus could be attributed to a lack of drive or ambition, this seems extremely unlikely based upon his efforts at West Point. It is more likely that he simply felt that his responsibilities as a MacArthur took precedence over those of the Army. Whether MacArthur recognized the danger or not, he turned things around when he arrived in Kansas.

MacArthur fondly recalls his command of Company K at Fort Leavenworth, commenting after a successful inspection, "I could not have been happier if they had made me a general."³⁵ Finally in command of troops and freed from familial and social distractions, MacArthur began to live up to his earlier potential. He pushed his troops

hard, but apparently earned their genuine respect. He also gained the respect of his superiors at Fort Leavenworth receiving consistently high marks on his efficiency reports and ever-increasing responsibility.³⁶ This turnabout clearly demonstrated the great accomplishments that MacArthur could achieve, once he focused his tremendous natural abilities. This period also illustrates the third characteristic of a dominant personality. The individual must be supremely competent at his or her chosen field; else the arrogance and stubbornness will get them nowhere.

Ernest King did not have quite the opportunity that MacArthur did to shape his destiny. Despite his high class standing, he took what the Navy offered and went to sea as a passed midshipman on a geodetic survey ship. He escaped from this dreary duty when his eye problems--developed squinting through survey equipment in the Caribbean sun--could not be treated on station and he was transferred back to New York.³⁷ After his eyes recovered he was assigned to the new battleship *Illinois* where he served as an aide to the embarked admiral. Following only a very short time on *Illinois*, the admiral's staff arranged a division officer job for King on the cruiser *Cincinnati*. Unfortunately for King, he had just promised the captain of the *Illinois* that he would remain on board after being offered another less desirable assignment. King waffled committing neither to accepting the offered job nor remaining on the *Illinois*. Despite his indecision, the transfer went through and he joined *Cincinnati* just as she departed for Europe.³⁸

King spent an uneventful year in European waters, easily passed his commissioning examination, and became an ensign. The *Cincinnati* was then transferred to the Asiatic Fleet. Despite his commissioning, King was still by far the junior of four division officers on board the cruiser; the other three had graduated two years ahead of

him from Annapolis. Nevertheless, with characteristic determination he set out to win the annual gunnery competition in 1903. In pursuing this goal he followed a dual track in what would become a characteristic approach to challenges. First of all, he drilled his forty men hard, imposing high standards in his desire to be “stern yet just.” Secondly, he tinkered incessantly with the aiming and control mechanism for his guns. Even going so far as drawing up his own blueprints so that Japanese shipyard workers would understand exactly what he wanted.³⁹ Through a combination of pushing his people and pushing technology he achieved his goal.

Although King’s career appeared to be on the right track at this point, arrogance and obstinacy would soon bring him to the brink of disaster. Within a period of several months after arriving in the Far East, King returned to the ship late on three separate occasions. The first earned him a warning and in response to each of the next two incidents he was confined to the ship for a brief period and an adverse comment was entered into his fitness report. Commander Osterhaus had taken command of the *Cincinnati* by this time and ended the second note in King’s fitness report as follows, “Ensign King is a young and promising officer and it would be unjust to him to overlook an offense of this nature.”⁴⁰

Following this incident King proved more punctual, but his temper and arrogance continued to compound the damage to a record that was already growing shaky. First he clashed with the *Cincinnati*’s navigator. When reprimanded by Commander Mason, who had not yet been relieved by Osterhaus, he stood his ground on the technically correct assertion that as Officer of the Deck, he not the navigator was responsible for the safety of the ship. Mason appears to be one of King’s few seniors to hold a grudge as he later

denied King's application for ordnance post-graduate schooling. King was later found relaxing in his stateroom by the executive officer when the latter believed he should be working. Rather than accept the executive officer's rebuke, King retorted, "Knock on my door before you open it and get the hell out of my room. I've already finished training my people."⁴¹ In response to this confrontation, Osterhaus again placed King on restriction and entered an additional adverse note in his fitness report. Despite these incidents and the boating episode years earlier King maintained Osterhaus's confidence and when the latter reached flag rank he would select King on two occasions to serve as his flag secretary. This either reflects an extremely forgiving nature or, more likely, demonstrates that King's remarkable competence and efficiency--like MacArthur's--were sufficient to overcome his persistent faults.

At this juncture, King had been overseas for nearly three years and wished to return home. He arranged to visit the commander of the Asiatic Fleet personally in an attempt to expedite his transfer. Here his obstinacy paid off as the admiral's staff first tried to convince him that he was not due to return home for two additional years and then told him the admiral could not be disturbed for several hours. King waited them out and received his transfer.⁴² He then made the long journey from the Far East to Washington, stopping along the way at West Point to visit his future bride. She was living with her sister and brother-in-law, a second lieutenant assigned to the academy. Walter D. Smith--who would later rise to brigadier general--would eventually become one of King's close friends and Smith's influence will be discussed subsequently.

Upon arrival in Washington, King visited the Bureau of Navigation seeking a new assignment. He and the detail officer--former executive officer of the *Illinois*,

Commander Usher--could not find a mutually agreeable assignment so King requested to speak to the head of the bureau. This turned out to be Rear Admiral Converse, former captain of the *Illinois*. The conversation between Usher and Converse is worth recounting from King's recollection:

"Admiral, this is Mr. King, who used to be in the *Illinois*."

"Yes, I remember him."

"Mr. King wants to go to sea in a battleship."

"That is what I advised him some years ago."⁴³

Despite the admiral's clear recollection that King had disregarded his advice and broken a promise by leaving the *Illinois* in 1903, King received his orders to the battleship *Alabama*. Again the results of competence prevailed over those of arrogance.

Aboard *Alabama* King's arrogance and imprudence earned him one additional negative remark on his fitness report, nearly tipping the balance and ending his career. As officer of the deck during a fleet exercise, he observed an improper signal being sent from the flag bridge--a separate space near the ship's bridge from which an embarked admiral can control numerous ships. King tried to halt the signal but it had already been acknowledged. He then called back to the flag bridge and directed that a correction be sent. This was perceived as an attempt to draw attention to a mistake made by the embarked admiral. The admiral took it as an affront and directed that King be relieved of his watch. The captain of the *Alabama* was then directed to restrict King to the ship for ten days and record the incident in his next fitness report. King now had four "black marks" on his record and resolved that there would be no more.⁴⁴ Despite his success in implementing this resolution, King's career was in danger and he realized it.

While assigned to the *Alabama*, he traveled to Washington to face an examination on his suitability for promotion to lieutenant. The examination consisted of three parts: a physical examination, a test of professional knowledge, and a review of the candidate's performance record. King was not worried about the first two, but was wise enough to be seriously concerned about the third. In the event, the promotion board made him sweat a bit, forcing him to read through all of the adverse comments in his record before them; but in the end he was promoted two grades to lieutenant, despite the "black marks."⁴⁵ It is interesting to speculate how MacArthur might have fared before a similar board at this point in his career.

Newly promoted and newly married, King reported to the Naval Academy in 1906. Given his recent ordeal before the promotion board, he could have been expected to keep a low profile and reign in his temper. He did neither. Shortly after arriving he began working on an article for the *Proceedings*, the professional journal of the United States Naval Institute, on the shortfalls in shipboard organization. His blunt criticism of current methods, which were essentially unchanged from the days of sail, was certainly justified but hardly prudent coming from a brand new lieutenant. King realized that his ideas were likely to meet opposition and included the following "disclaimer," which likely did little to soften the blow:

The writer fully realizes the possible opposition, for if there is anything more characteristic of the navy than its fighting ability, it is its inertia to change, or conservatism, or the clinging to things that are old because they are old. It must be admitted that this characteristic has been in many things a safeguard; it is also true that in quite as many it has been a drag to progress.⁴⁶

Surprisingly enough, this iconoclasm apparently brought King no adverse consequences.

King's temper, however, remained a danger to his continued success. The head of his department was Commander Grant, with whom he had clashed as a cadet some years before. Upon King's return to the academy, their relationship remained tense. Things came to a head one day when King received a memorandum accusing him of ignoring an order. When class ended, he rushed to the departmental office to confront Grant in front of other faculty members. The argument continued until Grant turned conciliatory to end the spectacle. Several days later the superintendent called King in and gave him an ultimatum, apologize to Grant or be detached from the academy. King, who believed he was in the right, thought it over then apologized.⁴⁷ This incident did not produce another unfavorable comment on his record, but easily could have. King's temper and sensitivity to perceived slights against his honor would continue to dog him throughout his career.

Three other notes about his time at Annapolis are illustrative. King pursued change in the navy through practical as well as theoretic methods. Working with a fellow officer he developed and designed a new range finding device to assist in targeting a ship's guns. The design was done to professional standards and a version of the device was eventually adopted and fielded throughout the fleet. It was also during this time that King began a serious study of military history, devouring with particular interest accounts of Napoleon and his marshals. He then discussed these theories at length with his brother-in-law as they walked the battlefields of the Civil War during family events.⁴⁸ This thorough understanding of land warfare was unusual in a naval officer of the time, and likely remains so today, but would serve him well in years to come. The final insight into his character from this period reflects his remarkable drive, dedication, and likely

ambition. During his three years of shore duty as a newlywed and new father, which he knew would be followed by a return to sea, he took not one day of leave.⁴⁹

By this time MacArthur and King had both recovered from early stumbles in their careers and were well on their way to achieving the greatness that their academy records had predicted. Each had also clearly demonstrated both the positive and negative personality characteristics that would shape their decisions between 1941 and 1945. During the years leading to the First World War each would continue to rise through the ranks and move toward the centers of power within their respective services. By the eve of war, MacArthur was serving on the General Staff of the Army in Washington and King was Flag Secretary to the Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet. One incident from each man's life during this period will serve to illustrate that the personality characteristics already identified continued.

During a tense period with Mexico the United States occupied the port of Vera Cruz in 1914. As tensions continued to escalate, it appeared a larger war was imminent. General Wood, who had just been relieved as Chief of Staff of the Army in order to command an expeditionary army preparing to go to Mexico, sent MacArthur to Vera Cruz to conduct a confidential reconnaissance in support of the possible invasion.⁵⁰ After MacArthur arrived and informed the local commander of his mission, he set off one night to find locomotive engines which had been hidden inland and would prove vital in supporting an invasion. A recent observer aptly described MacArthur's account of the excursion as reading like the script for the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.⁵¹ MacArthur rode hand-pumped railcars and stolen ponies deep into the interior with three Mexican accomplices, located five functional locomotives, and literally had to shoot his way back

to Vera Cruz, arriving safely just before dawn.⁵² The situation with Mexico was then peacefully resolved, and MacArthur returned to Washington.

Upon MacArthur's return, General Wood nominated him for the Medal of Honor in connection with the incident. General Scott, new Chief of Staff, formed a board to evaluate the recommendation. The board recommended against the award on the basis that MacArthur had not sufficiently coordinated his action with the local commander and could have endangered that commander's plans. Perhaps unaware that the board's recommendation was not binding and General Scott was continuing to consider the matter, Douglas was "incensed" at their findings and wrote a "straightforward" memorandum to Scott protesting the decision.⁵³ This memorandum must have been perceived as whining of a spoiled brat by many and in the end Scott approved the board's recommendation and MacArthur received no recognition for his accomplishment. While there do not seem to have been any adverse consequences--MacArthur was promoted to major shortly thereafter and remained on the General Staff--this incident does illustrate two things. On the positive side, MacArthur demonstrated no lack of initiative or courage and his military instincts seem sound as finding the locomotives would have been vital had it come to war. However, his lack of coordination with the local commander and his stunning lack of restraint when he felt his honor had been sullied reflect an overall lack of judgment.

That same year, King brought the destroyer *Cassin*--his second command--into the New York Navy Yard for boiler repairs. After growing increasingly frustrated with what he perceived as poor quality work by the yard workers, King took several of his crew members into the boiler to fix it themselves. They worked all night and in the

morning King told the officer in charge of the yard that he would now accept the work. The officer replied, “Thank God.”⁵⁴ While King’s temper likely had not made him any friends at the Navy Yard, his ingenuity and tenacity had seen the task at hand through to completion. This pattern would continue throughout his career.

By 1917 the lives of MacArthur and King had follow remarkably similar paths to remarkably similar positions. Each pursued and gained admission to the academy of their choice where each was quite successful. Both men encountered some difficulties in their early careers then seemed to get on track. Finally, they were of similar grade and in similarly influential positions as the United States prepared for war. Each man would also have a successful time during the war, but there would be distinct differences between their experiences and postwar positions.

MacArthur perceived combat on the fields of France as his first real chance to live up to his father’s heroism half a century before. By all accounts he met or exceeded the “boy colonel’s” example. However, before he could achieve anything he had to get from the General Staff to the field. Here his arrogance and imprudence apparently proved useful. Shortly after the declaration of war, a General Staff study recommending an army of 500,000 men, all regulars, to fight in Europe came across his desk for endorsement. He hastily scrawled that he “completely disagreed” with this recommendation but would not elaborate his reasons as he expected “no one would give them the slightest attention.”⁵⁵ The report then wound its way through channels until it ended on the desk of the Secretary of War with a positive endorsement from the Chief of Staff of the Army. The Secretary then summoned MacArthur to his office. The young major expected a reprimand, but instead the Secretary told him that he agreed with his point of view and

was taking him to see the president. The two of them then sold Wilson on the idea of using both regular and National Guard troops in order to build up strength on the continent as rapidly as possible. Baker then asked MacArthur for his recommendation on which state's National Guard division should be sent first. MacArthur suggested forming a division out of several units from different states that would stretch over the country like a rainbow. Thus the Rainbow Division was formed. Shortly thereafter Baker had MacArthur promoted to the rank of temporary colonel and assigned as chief of staff to the new division.⁵⁶

Once the division arrived in France in late 1917, MacArthur served in turn as chief of staff, brigade commander, and eventually division commander with distinction. He was promoted to the temporary rank of brigadier general along the way. In recognition for his consistent and conspicuous gallantry on the field, he was awarded seven rows of ribbons, including two Distinguished Service Crosses--one which had been downgraded from a second recommendation for the Medal of Honor--and seven Silver Stars.⁵⁷ While MacArthur's earlier pouting about the award he did not receive in 1914 might call future decorations into question, such an impressive record could not have been compiled without significant and steadfast bravery in combat. This personal courage was reflection of the audacity, which in turn was a product of MacArthur's military competence and his arrogance. This audacity would continue to shape his decisions throughout his career.

King's war was not nearly so dramatic nor so perilous. In August 1917, Admiral Mayo decided to visit Europe to observe the war and the U.S. Navy's participation in it, which at this time had not amounted to much. He brought King and other key members

of his staff along. Owing to Mayo's seniority and prestige as fleet commander his entourage received great attention. Buell notes, "King became a privileged sightseer in a world at war."⁵⁸ Over the winter of 1917 to 1918 Mayo attempted unsuccessfully to permanently shift his command to Europe in order to be closer to the action. Failing this he returned the next summer for similar observations and conferences, bringing King along again. During this time King was twice promoted and ended the war with the temporary rank of captain. Although he had seen little combat, he had been afforded the unique opportunity to observe the inner workings of coalition warfare as he attended numerous naval and high-level military conferences as a member of Mayo's staff.⁵⁹ From King's memoirs he genuinely liked and respected Admiral Mayo,⁶⁰ perhaps this accounts for the fact that King's arrogance and temper seem to have caused him no difficulty during this period.

By this time each man had firmly established the ideals, predilections, and quirks that would carry them through to the Second World War. Therefore only a few selected events from the interwar period will be highlighted. Curiously enough both men proceeded from their wartime duties to senior positions within the military education system. MacArthur assumed the superintendency of the troubled Military Academy at West Point, and King was charged with reestablishing the Naval War College. Each accomplished their duties with customary efficiency and unsurprisingly ruffled some feathers along the way.

Following his years at West Point, where he may have saved the institution but made few friends, MacArthur alternated between assignments in the Philippines and the United States without significant incident. One incident from this period demonstrates

both his continuing ambition and political savvy. In 1929 MacArthur was offered the position of Chief of Engineers in a Corps of Engineers that was busily engaged in flood control and construction projects across the nation. Against the advice of friends he turned the position down. He recognized that his lack of engineering experience--he had transferred to the infantry in 1917 and had little effective experience before then--would provoke an outcry among many. Such a controversy would likely severely damage his chances of achieving the pinnacle for which his father had strived and failed.⁶¹ His gamble paid off, and he was selected Chief of Staff of the Army in 1930. His appointment provoked a slight controversy in the press and he had to fight some desperate battles for funds while leading the Army through the depression, but overall his tour seems successful with one exception.

In the spring of 1932 a mob composed primarily of disgruntled veterans of the First World War descended upon Washington, DC, demanding a bonus which was due to all veterans in 1945. Their demands were not met, and a large number established a camp in Anacostia. In July following morning clashes with the local police, the District of Columbia authorities requested federal troops to assist. Contingency plans had been in place for some time and a force was quickly assembled. Showing a serious lapse in judgment and against the advice of Major Dwight D. Eisenhower from the General Staff, MacArthur chose to accompany the troops suppressing the riot. He compounded the error by wearing a uniform coat with all his ribbons, and a number of columnists later commented on the contrast between the chief of staff's "parade uniform" and the bedraggled bonus army.⁶² MacArthur would spend a number of years fighting the adverse publicity that came out of this incident, including at least one libel suit.

Despite this incident he went on to successfully serve as chief of staff for several years under President Roosevelt. When his term expired, he gratefully took the opportunity to serve as military advisor in the Philippines, rather than accept a command in the United States that would be subordinate to the new chief of staff. There he would remain, recalled to active duty in 1941, until his evacuation from Corregidor.

Ernest King's interwar years were marked by a restless expansion of his professional talents. Cutting his time short at the War College because of a personality conflict with incoming Superintendent of the Naval Academy--at the time the War College was collocated with the academy; King went back to sea on the only ship available, a fleet supply ship.⁶³ Disliking this duty and finding no suitable alternative assignments, he attended submarine school as a captain among ensigns in order to take command of a submarine flotilla. While in command of his flotilla on maneuvers, a familiar pattern repeated itself.

One evening, King chose to disregard naval custom and got his flotilla underway without asking permission from the scouting fleet commander, Vice Admiral "Long John" McDonald. When the flagship queried him by flashing light he signaled back that he was underway based upon the written operations order and steamed away as the flagship continued to signal. "The [resulting] correspondence carried on for several months," King said afterward, "until the file was at least half an inch thick. Finally, Long John stated that the incident was closed, which was the usual way of saying that I had won."⁶⁴ Despite his continuing habit of annoying senior officers--he recounts several other incidents where he verbally clashed with officers of flag rank--King's career continued to flourish. This was in large part due to his direction of the recovery of the

sunken submarine *S-51* in 1926. However, following this accomplishment he found himself stuck again without suitable orders.

On this occasion he struck a deal with the head of the newly formed Bureau of Aviation. If he could complete flight school, he would receive command of a seaplane tender and ultimately an aircraft carrier. King obliged and took command of the seaplane tender *Wright*. Shortly thereafter he was called upon to direct the recovery of another sunken submarine then briefly assigned command of a naval air station. Finally in 1930, despite leaving a trail of aggrieved seniors and subordinates behind him, King achieved his goal and took command of the nearly new aircraft carrier *Lexington*.⁶⁵ Thus, his sheer military competence coupled with adept maneuvering within the different branches had overcome his arrogance and temper yet again.

Following successful command of the *Lexington*, from which he directed a successful surprise attack of Pearl Harbor during an exercise, he assumed duties as the second head of the Bureau of Aeronautics. He then went back to sea as commander of the aircraft base force (seaplanes) and the aircraft scouting force (carriers.) In this latter role he conducted another successful notional attack on Hawaii.⁶⁶ However, the bad blood he had left behind finally caught up with him as he completed this last tour. Despite his successful record he did not receive either of the navy's top jobs, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) or Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet. Instead he was ordered to the General Board, a flag officer think tank generally seen as a stepping stone to retirement.

However, King refused to go quietly and dove into the work of the board with enthusiasm. His efforts attracted the attention of the new CNO, Admiral Stark, who

arranged for him to go back to sea in command of the Patrol Force (formerly the Atlantic Squadron) in 1940. This was a junior billet to that which he had previously held, particularly since most of the fleet was then in the Pacific, but his enthusiasm continued unabated. His skill in prosecuting the “semiwar” against German submarines in the summer of 1941 was noticed and shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor he was recalled to Washington and appointed Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet.⁶⁷

Over the course of their entire lives, over sixty years by this time, both MacArthur and King had remained remarkably true to the characteristics formed and exhibited in each from childhood; characteristics which this thesis has termed a dominant personality. This examination has also shown an amazing degree of symmetry between the lives of the two men, particularly up to the First World War. While chance was certainly the major factor in bringing these two men into position to influence the course of the conflict against Japan, their dominant personalities virtually assured that, if they could find a way to do so, each would wield considerable influence over the next war. It is further interesting to note that in George Hall’s book *The Fifth Star*, a study of the ten men to achieve the United States military’s highest rank, he singles out only two of the ten as suffering from serious character flaws. They are, of course, MacArthur and King.⁶⁸

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2. Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: Da Capo, 1964), 3.

3. James, *Volume I*, 11.

4. *Ibid.*, 42.

5. Ibid., 44.
6. Thomas B. Buell, *Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Fleet Admiral J. Ernest King* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1980), 5.
7. Ernest J. King and Walter M. Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* (New York: W. H. Norton & Company, 1952), 13.
8. Ibid., 12.
9. MacArthur, 15.
10. Buell, 4.
11. MacArthur, 16.
12. James, *Volume I*, 60-1.
13. MacArthur, 18.
14. King, 14.
15. Ibid., 14.
16. James, *Volume I*, 72.
17. Ibid., 76.
18. MacArthur, 27.
19. Buell, 9.
20. King, 19-23.
21. Ibid., 21.
22. Ibid., 25.
23. James, *Volume I*, 90.
24. MacArthur, 34.
25. James, *Volume I*, 91.

26. Ibid., 40.
27. Carol Morris Petillo, *Douglas MacArthur: The Philippine Years* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), 83.
28. James, *Volume I*, 91.
29. Ibid., 92-3.
30. Ibid., 96.
31. Ibid., 96.
32. MacArthur, 33.
33. James, *Volume I*, 98.
34. Ibid., 99.
35. MacArthur, 34.
36. Ibid., 102.
37. Buell, 17.
38. Ibid., 19-20.
39. Ibid., 21.
40. King, 52.
41. Buell, 24-5
42. King, 61.
43. Ibid., 63-4.
44. Ibid., 68.
45. Buell, 30.
46. King, 75.

47. Buell, 31-2.
48. Ibid., 34.
49. Ibid., 35.
50. James, *Volume I*, 117.
51. George M. Hall, *The Fifth Star: High Command in an Era of Global War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 84.
52. MacArthur, 42.
53. James, *Volume I*, 126.
54. King, 94.
55. MacArthur, 45.
56. James, *Volume I*, 134-5.
57. Hall, 85.
58. Buell, 50.
59. Ibid., 51.
60. King, 145.
61. James, *Volume I*, 343.
62. Ibid., 399.
63. Buell, 58.
64. Ibid., 63.
65. Ibid., 76-80.
66. Hall, 62.
67. Buell, 152.
68. Hall, 182.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: IMPACT

Having demonstrated that both General MacArthur and Admiral King possessed the three components of a dominant personality--confidence, persistence, and competence--in abundance, this thesis will examine how three key strategic decisions in the Pacific War were effected by one or both of these dominant. The first was the choice to begin limited offensive operations with available assets beginning in February 1942. The second key decision was the initiation of offensive amphibious operations with the invasion of Guadalcanal in August 1942. The final key decision was the struggle that raged through much of the war regarding the relative priority of the Allied drives across the Central and Southwestern Pacific which culminated with the Luzon versus Formosa debate.

MacArthur and King played distinctly different roles in each case; thus, their personalities affected each decision quite differently. In the first case King and his staff drove the decision-making process with little input or interference from MacArthur or Army planners in Washington. It was therefore essentially a case of a dominant personality operating unopposed. With regard to the invasion of Guadalcanal, both MacArthur and King were working toward the same objective, the capture of the major Japanese base at Rabaul, but each wished to achieve the objective in their own fashion. This was a case of two dominant personalities working in competition toward the same objective. Regarding the liberation of the Philippines, MacArthur was an unwavering, almost fanatical, advocate of this course of action from the moment he left Corregidor. King, on the other hand, opposed the islands as a primary objective from the beginning,

and remained steadfast in his opposition long after all other key decision-makers had been convinced of the desirability of invading Luzon. Therefore, this case serves to illustrate the effects of two dominant personalities pursuing diametrically opposed courses of action.

In addition to reflecting the personalities of MacArthur and King each of these decisions is worth examining for at least two other reasons. First of all, none of the three was a trivial choice easily arrived upon. In the case of the Luzon invasion, the difficulty in reaching consensus clearly highlights the challenging environment in which the decision was made. However, the obstacles facing the other two decisions are not so obvious, particularly in hindsight. These challenges will be discussed in greater detail below. In summary the early carrier raids and the Guadalcanal invasion were both executed by gambling scarce assets at times when agreed-upon Allied grand strategy probably indicated that each was premature.

The second reason these decisions are of continuing interest is their significant impact on the course of the war. Again, this is more apparent in the third case and less obvious in the other two. Nevertheless, the evidence strongly suggests that the early carrier raids had strategic impact far beyond their rather meager tactical results. In the case of Guadalcanal, the island could likely have been invaded or bypassed at a later date when sufficient forces had been built up in the theater. However, the threat that strong Japanese positions in the Solomon Islands could have presented to Allied lines of communication with Australia, which both King and MacArthur used to justify the invasion, was very real. Even had the Japanese not successfully interdicted these communications, a later invasion would almost certainly have encountered better-

prepared positions and thus incurred more casualties. As with the context, the significance of each decision will be discussed in greater detail below.

The strategic decision to begin limited offensive operations against Japan in the first months of the war was actually a series of decisions, reached by planners and commanders in Washington between January and March 1942. As mentioned above, Admiral King was the driving force behind these decisions while General MacArthur--coordinating the doomed defense of the Philippines through most of this period--had little or no impact on the debate. The other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff also offered minimal resistance to King's initiative. General Marshall and General Arnold were primarily concerned with the situation in Europe; where there was pressure from multiple sources for the United States to begin offensive operations as soon as possible.¹ Admiral Stark--still Chief of Naval Operations and a member of the Joint Chiefs at this time--seemed content to let King take the lead as well.² Admiral Nimitz had just taken command of the Pacific Fleet and he actually acted as a limited brake upon King's drive to start attacking immediately.³ However, Nimitz was far from a "do-nothing" commander, and the prudent reinforcement of key islands that he insisted upon slowed operations down very little. For all practical purposes, King was acting unopposed.

Although there was no individual opposition to his push to initiate offensive operations, King faced other challenges in pushing his agenda through. In the immediate aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Pacific Fleet's three aircraft carriers--soon to be augmented to five with transfers from the Atlantic Fleet--were effectively the sole defense of remaining U.S. interests in the Pacific, interests which spread from Panama to Samoa. Complicating this difficult task was the fact that the

outnumbered carriers were also outclassed by the Japanese in both aircraft capability and pilot training. Thus, it would not have seemed an imprudent strategy at the time to husband these scarce assets, particularly after American planners had just reassured their British counterparts at the Arcadia Conference that the defeat of Germany remained the top U.S. priority.⁴

However, Admiral King was not naturally inclined to sit back and let events take their course. The initiative, innovation, and audacity he had displayed throughout his life would spur him to find every way possible to strike back at the Japanese with the limited assets available as soon as possible. He would later describe his vision of war strategy using the following analogy. The war would go through four phases, which he defined in terms of a boxer:

- (1) Defensive phase . . . a boxer covering up.
- (2) Defensive-offensive phase . . . a boxer covering up while seeking an opening to counterpunch.
- (3) Offensive-defensive phase . . . blocking punches with one hand while hitting with the other.
- (4) Offensive phase . . . hitting with both hands.⁵

While most planners would not have disagreed with this analogy, King's desire to shift from the defensive phase to the defensive-offensive almost immediately ran into resistance. In response to this resistance, he pushed harder, pressing Nimitz to begin offensive operations from early January on. He kept the Joint Chiefs and the president informed of his plans but did not expend excessive energy coordinating the details.

As mentioned, Nimitz insisted upon fortifying Samoa and other key points before yielding to the King's demands, which were coming with "increasing urgency" by the end of January.⁶ Early raids against the Marshalls and Gilberts produced little result but

proved good practice. The first raid that would yield significant results was actually under the strategic command of King, not Nimitz.

In late January, King had directed Nimitz to assign *Lexington* and her escorts to the ANZAC Force--a combined force consisting of ships from America, Australia, and New Zealand operating in the Southwest Pacific. This force was not subordinate to the Pacific Fleet, but rather reported directly to Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet (COMINCH). One of King's biographers attributes this arrangement to a lack of trust in Nimitz, but it seems more likely that the decision simply reflected the growing pains afflicting Allied strategy and command arrangements in early 1942. Nevertheless, King himself gave the order that launched the fateful attack of 10 March.⁷ Vice Admiral Brown's *Lexington* force--reinforced by the *Yorktown* Task Force after an unsuccessful attempt to strike the Japanese base at Rabaul in February--was poised in early March to make another attempt at this key facility. After receiving King's order to initiate this second attack, an even more tempting target presented itself. On 8 March Japanese forces had landed at the small villages of Lae and Salamaua on the northern coast of eastern New Guinea. Brown decided to strike these forces before they could complete their offload and dig in. He attacked from the Coral Sea to the south, sending 104 aircraft over the Owen Stanley Mountains and catching the Japanese completely by surprise.⁸ The aviators met little or no air defense and the Navy's semiofficial history notes that they had a field day "remembering Pearl." As with most air raids the damage was less than originally claimed, but even so the Japanese lost a light cruiser, a heavy minesweeper, and a large transport.⁹ These were the first real losses inflicted by the Americans, and they served to shake the confidence of Japanese commanders on the spot.

Their composure was so rattled that further amphibious operations were placed on hold until the American carrier threat could be countered with escorting Japanese carriers. These carriers were not immediately available, thus the Japanese did not move upon Port Moresby until May. When they finally moved, they did so with an elaborate plan reflecting the considerable caution they had acquired since the Lae and Salamaua raids.¹⁰ This plan would be thwarted by the tactically indecisive but strategically significant Battle of Coral Sea, which forced a temporary pause in the Japanese offensive. Following their disastrous defeat at Midway the next month, the temporary pause became permanent and Port Moresby was never again threatened by sea. Thus, King's aggressiveness and persistence forced the raid that disrupted Japan's flow and arguably saved Port Moresby, which interestingly enough would soon serve as MacArthur's launch point for his campaign back to the Philippines. The other raid that King pushed through would have even greater strategic effects.

From the first days of the war there had been a widespread desire to strike back at the Japanese homeland in response to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. However, following Japan's early success throughout the Pacific and given the severely limited American resources in the area, no easy avenue of attack presented itself. Then in early January, Captain Low, King's Chief of Staff, noticed Army Air Corps medium bombers operating at a Naval Air Station he was visiting. This sparked an idea to hit Tokyo with bombers launched from an aircraft carrier in the northwestern Pacific. Since medium bombers could conceivably launch safely from a carrier but could not possibly recover aboard they would have to proceed to China after the attack. While no Navy bombers had the range to make that flight, longer-range Army aircraft might. Low presented the

idea to King aboard his flagship when he returned to Washington that evening. King was enthusiastic about the concept. This enthusiasm could have been expected given the affinity toward innovation that King had displayed throughout his career. King tasked his air operations officer, Captain Duncan, to investigate the feasibility of the idea immediately. Duncan soon found that the idea was technically sound and King directed Duncan and Low to present the plan to General Arnold who also proved enthusiastic. With Arnold's support planning and preparation continued. Sixteen B-25 bombers were modified and loaded aboard the *Hornet* in San Francisco. In the interest of secrecy King did not even inform the President until less than 24 hours before the attack.¹¹

King's motivation in risking two aircraft carriers--the risk of approaching the Home Islands even to the relatively long range of this attack was very real--is not completely clear. Most historians attribute the attack to a desire raise American morale and strike at Japanese confidence. These same commentators generally conclude that such a benefit was not worth the risk. King himself briefly notes the attack in his memoirs, but focuses mainly on the planning process vice the strategic objective. It seems possible that King--who had been fending off nearly continuous requests from concerned congressmen to station his forces off the coast of their districts--understood the psychological impact such an attack would have upon the Japanese, and the resulting pressure it would place upon their planning and force allocation.¹² However, even the most optimistic planner could not have anticipated the full effect of the raid.

One popular historian eloquently describes the impact as follows, "Doolittle's Tokyo raid caused an agony of shame among Japan's admirals and generals, to whom protection of the emperor's person and residence was a sacred trust."¹³ This humiliation

could not have come at a worse time for the long-term prospects of the Japanese Empire. For in April 1942 a debate was raging between the land-based Imperial Naval Staff in Tokyo and the staff of Admiral Yamamoto's Combined Fleet at sea.

Admiral Yamamoto and his staff, like most naval planners in the world at the time, were firmly wedded to the strategic tenants of Alfred Thayer Mahan.¹⁴ Mahan was an American strategist who had advocated two central concepts at the turn of the century. First he claimed that "sea power," a phrase he claimed to have invented, was the one essential ingredient in any successful empire. Secondly he counseled that "sea power" should always be used in a conflict to gain "command of the sea" by decisively defeating the enemy fleet which in turn would lead to the enemy's defeat.¹⁵ The Japanese adopted both principals whole-heartedly. First they constructed a powerful modern navy in order to gain the "sea power" that would allow them to achieve the empire to which they felt they were entitled. When this fleet was ready, they challenged China then Russia. In each case the Japanese fleet decisively defeated the main battle fleet of the enemy and Japan emerged victorious.

Therefore the problem facing Japan in early 1942 seemed clear to the staff of the Combined Fleet. The American Pacific Fleet had been badly damaged at Pearl Harbor but not defeated. In order to achieve victory the remainder of the fleet must be vanquished. Yamamoto felt the best way to achieve that goal was by attacking an objective that the Americans would be forced to defend, then defeating the fleet when it came forth to do so. He and his staff believed that Midway Island was the closest such objective and therefore the only logical place to attack. The Imperial Naval Staff also believed that decisive defeat of the Pacific Fleet was vital, but they felt that Midway was

the wrong place to seek battle. The planners were particularly concerned with the fact that Midway was within range of land-based bombers from Hawaii but outside the range of any Japanese land-based planes. The debate had been underway for several weeks when Doolittle's bombers struck. All opposition to Yamamoto's plan ceased and the Combined Fleet sailed to a spectacular defeat in June.¹⁶

Few people seem to have realized the impact of the raid at the time or even in retrospect. As mentioned many commentators continue to describe it as a foolish risk with little strategic value. These accounts likely reflect the attitude at the time as well and thus represented King's most formidable challenge in pushing his plans through. For example, E. B. Potter's biography of Nimitz describes the Doolittle raid as a plan initiated by the Army Air Force and presented to Nimitz by "an emissary from the Joint Chiefs of Staff." This depiction is simply wrong in the first case and misleading in the second. Navy planners in Washington came up with the initial idea and did most of the work to develop the plan. Furthermore, Captain Duncan was indeed assigned to the staff of one of the members of the Joint Chiefs, but it would have been far clearer to describe him as King's Air Operations Officer. Potter goes on to claim that Nimitz was dubious about the decision to raid Tokyo from the start and came to "seriously regret" the whole operation as the Battle of the Coral Sea developed.¹⁷

It seems clear that King faced considerable challenges in initiating offensive raids against Japan when he did and a man of lesser tenacity and aggressiveness might not have pressed them through. It is equally clear that these raids had strategic impact far beyond the limited tactical damage inflicted. Thus it is fair to state that the often ill-

considered audacity and granite obstinacy, which King displayed throughout his life, significantly influenced the course of the war in the Pacific during this time frame.

The choices described above led directly to the Battle of Midway in June 1942. During the course of this battle the balance of naval power in the Pacific shifted decisively in the favor of the Allies. The Japanese lost four carriers, the United States lost one. Of greater long-term significance, the United States had ample industrial capability to make up its losses while the Japanese did not. Therefore the fundamental strategy of both sides had to change after this battle. The Allies could now seriously consider offensive operations to roll back the Japanese Empire and the best the Japanese could now hope for was to inflict sufficient casualties to force a negotiated peace of favorable terms.

This change in strategies set the stage for the next key decision to be examined. The choice to invade Guadalcanal in August 1942 was based upon this new situation. In this case the two dominant personalities--King and MacArthur--were engaged in competition toward the same objective, because the environment presented only one realistic goal. Although the balance had shifted enough to allow the Allies to realistically consider offensive operations, such operations would have to be conducted with minimal augmentation to the forces already in theater. In the summer of 1942 American industrial production was still ramping up and the limited flow of war material was spread thin across global commitments. Given these relatively meager resources, a drive across the Central Pacific as envisioned in pre-war plans was not yet possible. The consistently inhospitable weather of the North Pacific made operations along that axis impractical for both sides--the successful Japanese seizure of two strategically

insignificant atolls in the Aleutian Islands during the Midway operation notwithstanding. Therefore initial operations would have to be in the South and Southwest Pacific. The Japanese had helped narrow the choices in May when they continued their offensive down the Solomon Islands and into eastern New Guinea, clearly threatening communications with Australia.

As mentioned above, the Battle of the Coral Sea had forced the Japanese to postpone amphibious operations against Port Moresby; but it did not halt the offensive operations in the area. These operations were primarily supported out of the major base at Rabaul on New Britain. Thus both King and MacArthur perceived offensive operations with the ultimate objective of Rabaul as the next logical step after the victory at Midway. For MacArthur this was a shift in perspective, but it was merely a continuation of a theme for King.

Despite his bold promise to return upon arriving in Australia in March, MacArthur's first concern was with the defense of the newly established Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), of which he was the Supreme Commander. In retrospect MacArthur recalls his initiative to defend Australia from New Guinea as affording "an opportunity to pass from defense to offense, to seize the initiative, move forward and attack."¹⁸ However his communications to General Marshall, following the diversion of aircraft originally destined for SWPA to the Central Pacific and the recall of carrier forces from his waters over his objections, are likely a better reflection of his mood at the time. On 23 May, MacArthur recommended that the Atlantic and Indian Oceans be temporarily stripped of air and naval forces in order to provide for the defense of Australia. "If this is not done," he warned, "much more than the fate of Australia will be

jeopardized. The United States itself will face a series of such disasters and a crisis of such proportions as she never faced in the long years of her existence.”¹⁹ Despite MacArthur’s shrill hyperbole, Nimitz retained these disputed forces, which proved instrumental to the victory at Midway.

Following that victory MacArthur quickly discarded his pessimism, and on 8 June he forwarded an ambitious plan to seize Rabaul to Marshall. In addition to the three infantry divisions already in SWPA, MacArthur requested one division of troops trained in amphibious operations and naval support forces including two aircraft carriers. With these forces he claimed he could seize Rabaul in less than three weeks. The War Department forwarded the plan to the Joint Chiefs with a positive endorsement on 12 June.²⁰ Since the proposal would involve placing significant naval forces under Army command and allowing MacArthur to direct amphibious operations, this plan never had a chance of winning King’s approval. It will be recalled that King’s distrust of MacArthur’s ability to properly employ naval forces was a major factor in Roosevelt’s decision to divide the Pacific in the first place. The Navy Department, likely reflecting their lack of enthusiasm, took nearly two weeks to comment on the proposal.²¹

The proposal with which the Navy Department responded was simply a continuation of the basic strategy that King had been pressing for months. In a 2 March memorandum to the Joint Chiefs, King had proposed protecting communications with Australia by setting up “strong points” from which a step-by-step advance could be made up the Solomon Islands.²² The Joint Chiefs were not ready to consider any such advance in the dark days of that spring, but King maintained constant pressure. The Army’s official account of the period notes that, “Firmly and with conviction they [naval

planners] argued that until such time as the all-out offensive against Japan could begin, the United States must maintain and *improve* its strategic position in the Pacific.”[emphasis added]²³ Despite King’s consistent appeals, Marshall--the other dominant player on the Joint Chiefs--remained firmly committed to “Germany First” and opposed to any force build up in the Pacific beyond that strictly required for defense. In early May King and Marshall reached an impasse. They took their dispute to the President, who decided in favor of Europe.²⁴ However, MacArthur’s proposal had evidently shaken Marshall’s opposition to offensive operations in the Pacific, at least for the moment, and King moved to exploit the opening.

The Navy proposed a step-by-step assault up the Solomon Islands, beginning with Tulagi and reaching Rabaul at some later date. Since the operations would be primarily amphibious in nature, they would naturally be under Nimitz’s command. However, the long-term occupation troops would come from SWPA and these would be under MacArthur’s command.²⁵

When informed of the Navy’s proposal it is hardly surprising that MacArthur flew into a rage. He sent a blistering reply to Marshall claiming that Navy clearly intended to take the dominant role in his theater relegating the Army to mere support functions.²⁶ MacArthur further argued that since the objective was within his area of responsibility, there could be no question of him retaining overall command. When Marshall forwarded MacArthur’s objections to King, they received little sympathy. King in fact insisted “the primary consideration is the immediate initiation of these operations. I think it is important that this be done even if no support of Army forces in the Southwest Pacific is made available.”²⁷ Once King had made it clear that he was willing to execute the attack

MacArthur's control, Marshall began to engineer a compromise.

Marshall and King met face-to-face on 29 June. Amazingly enough, the argument up to this time had been carried out through the exchange of memoranda--this author cannot imagine a more vivid illustration of the danger of strategic command by committee. In light of MacArthur's concerns, King proposed that only the initial invasion be executed under Navy command, specifically Vice Admiral Ghormley, Commander South Pacific Area and Force, under the direction of Nimitz. Overall command would shift to MacArthur following the invasion. Marshall immediately forwarded this proposal to MacArthur. While awaiting MacArthur's reply, Marshall received another dispatch from Australia. MacArthur claimed that Navy's proposal was clear evidence of a plan which had come "under my observation accidentally as far back as ten years ago," in which the Navy would arrange the "complete absorption of the national defense function." The Navy would accomplish this goal by using Army troops to garrison captured islands in order to maintain the Marines, which MacArthur described as "an army of their own," in a readily available status.²⁸ Given King's temper, it is probably well that Marshall chose to forward neither MacArthur's conspiracy theory nor his subsequent objection to the plan to shift command during the campaign.

Despite the protests from Australia, King and Marshall agreed on 1 July to divide the campaign for Rabaul into three tasks.

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Task One. | Seizure and occupation of Santa Cruz Islands and Tulagi.
(Operation Watchtower) |
| Task Two. | Seizure and occupation of Lae, Salamaua, and Northeast coast of New Guinea. |

Task Three. Seizure and occupation of Rabaul and adjacent positions in the New Guinea-New Ireland area.²⁹

The first of these tasks would be under a commander to be designated by Nimitz and the latter two would be under MacArthur's command. The Joint Chiefs' directive established 1 August as the target date for the first task, but did not specify dates for the others. Possibly in response to MacArthur's concerns above, Marshall desired that the garrison for Tulagi come from the South Pacific Area vice SWPA. He therefore suggested that the boundary between the theaters be shifted west to 159° East Longitude. King agreed and the directive was transmitted on 2 July.³⁰

In this case Marshall's diplomatic skill averted the stalemate that seems certain to have ensued had MacArthur's views been completely and honestly represented to the Joint Chiefs. However the personalities of King and MacArthur still had significant impact on the strategic decision-making process in this case. It is perhaps fortunate that the effects were contradictory and somewhat offsetting.

On the one hand, the aggressive competition to seize the initiative--both from the Japanese and from each other--drove them to press forward plans that were not fully supportable. For example, MacArthur's bold promise to capture Rabaul in three weeks was either a calculated bargaining position or a recipe for disaster; it was certainly not a realistic plan. King's counter-proposal to invade the Solomons without Army support was even more arrogant and irresponsible. The combined effect of this bidding war produced an operation that was rushed to execution with barely adequate resources. In view of the limited assets available for Operation Watchtower, as the invasion of Tulagi

and Guadalcanal was officially known, planners and participants began referring to it as “Operation Shoestring” instead.³¹

On the other hand, the extended negotiations between King and MacArthur slowed progress toward any decision, which wasted valuable time and ran the significant risk of handing the initiative back to the Japanese. This bureaucratic wrangling also robbed time from the operational planners--it took almost a month from MacArthur’s initial proposal until the Joint Chiefs issued their directive. However, this wasted time did allow additional time to train forces and move supplies into place. Ghormley would need all that time and more before he was finally prepared to execute Task One on 7 August 1942.

Despite the bitter debate that proceeded the operation and the narrow margin upon which it was executed, King evidently viewed his contribution to the decision with some pride. In his memoirs he included the following quote from the Marine Corps history of the period, “And so while King’s reiteration of *attack, seize the initiative, and do it now* was beginning to take on the throbbing insistence of a war drum, and while Marshall was temporizing in his replies to him, the plans for the offensive began to be implemented.”

[emphasis original]³² MacArthur makes no mention of the above debate in *Reminiscences* except to note that he proposed a single unified drive under a unified command during the summer of 1942.³³

As could have been expected for an operation carried out on such a narrow margin, the battle for Guadalcanal dragged on for far longer than anticipated. Despite brutal losses on the ground and at sea, American forces were eventually triumphant and the Japanese withdrew from the island on 7 February 1943. In the meantime, MacArthur

had successfully executed Task Two, and Task Three had been placed on indefinite hold. Over the remainder of 1943 Allied forces would gain momentum on both the drive across the Central Pacific under Nimitz and MacArthur's campaign up New Guinea toward the Philippines. These successes kept the Japanese off balance, but also set up another even more bitter confrontation between MacArthur and King.

When MacArthur made his promise to return to the Philippines in March 1942, he had no doubt that such a return was a key war goal shared by Allied planners. This faith is similar to his earlier conviction that the Philippines would be vigorously defended and reinforced in the event of war with Japan.³⁴ However, Allied war planners had reached no such conclusion. When MacArthur made his bold commitment, most strategists were concentrating solely on defensive plans to hold remaining vital interests in the Pacific. Following Singapore's collapse in February and the complete conquest of the Dutch East Indies in March, the Japanese appeared unstoppable. Calling the former "the greatest disaster in our history," Churchill despaired of retaining any influence in the area and seriously feared for the survival of both Australia and India.³⁵ Other leaders generally shared his gloom with one notable exception, Admiral King.

As discussed above, King was already envisioning the shift from the defensive-offensive to the offensive-defensive during this period. However, even though his proposed initial attacks would occur in the South Pacific, King envisioned the main drive taking place across the Central Pacific in accordance with pre-war plans--such a drive was initially proposed in the Plan Orange series and carried over into the Rainbow series. In fact MacArthur's vision of a triumphant return was nearly derailed by strategists in Washington before it could begin. The initial proposal before the Joint Chiefs regarding

areas of responsibility would have placed the Philippines within Nimitz's area not MacArthur's. Only Marshall's intercession on his behalf, for "psychological reasons," put the Philippines in SWPA.³⁶ Throughout the long and bloody battle for Guadalcanal, King remained steadfast in his support for a Navy-dominated drive across the Central Pacific, seeming to envision MacArthur's role in the south as primarily a holding action. This view appears to have prevailed at Allied strategic planning conferences as well.

At the Quadrant Conference in Quebec, in August 1943, British planners proposed a meticulous advance to Japan through China and the Central Pacific which would result in Japan's defeat in 1948. The Joint Chiefs deemed this an unacceptable delay and responded with a timetable for a two-pronged advance across the Pacific with Nimitz capturing or neutralizing the Marshalls, the Gilberts, and the Palaus and MacArthur reaching the west end of New Guinea by the end of 1944. While the Joint Chiefs did not specify which campaign should receive priority, they did note that "due weight should be given to the fact that operations in the Central Pacific promise more rapid advance."³⁷

In December a similar conference in Cairo confirmed this strategy. As Marshall was returning from Cairo and Tehran he traveled to New Guinea to meet with MacArthur, their only face-to-face meeting during the conflict. While MacArthur's views were already well known to Marshall, one aspect of their meeting is worth recounting. MacArthur, expressing his disbelief that the Navy would not trust him with command of large naval forces, made the following pitch:

I called Marshall's attention to the fact that all naval disasters in the Pacific--Pearl Harbor, Macassar Strait, and the four-cruiser loss to an unscathed enemy in the Solomon Sea--had been under naval commanders; that in my area we had no

naval losses of such character; that the Navy and the Air Force had no greater supporter and booster than I.³⁸

Marshall again displayed his value as a buffer and chose not to relay MacArthur's comments. Had these harsh words reached King, it is unlikely that the relatively smooth cooperation which had been worked out between the Army and Navy in the Pacific would have emerged unscathed. It appears that King recognized the value of Marshall's cool head as well. According to his account, he went to see the president at the Quebec conference and again in Cairo to argue that Marshall was an indispensable member of the Joint Chiefs, who could not be spared to serve as Supreme Allied Commander during the invasion of France--a position for which Marshall was apparently being seriously considered.³⁹

Despite the Combined Chiefs' unwavering support, planners closer to the problem were less convinced of the desirability of a two-pronged attack. At a meeting in Pearl Harbor in January 1944, planners from SWPA managed to convince Nimitz and his staff that a single-pronged advance would be more efficient. There was a general agreement at this conference "that ultimate objective of the Pacific advance was China and that the road to China lay through the Philippines."⁴⁰ Following the conference, Nimitz recommended to Washington a single pronged-attack aimed at Mindanao in the Philippines.⁴¹

King responded to this recommendation in typical fashion. Believing that Nimitz shared his view or at least granting him the benefit of the doubt, he cabled Nimitz, "I'm afraid . . . that you have not . . . maintained these views sufficiently positively vis-a-vis the officers from the SOUTH and SOUTHWEST PACIFIC." He expressed similar

doubts to the other members of the Joint Chiefs in Washington and reminded them that the principle of two mutually supporting drives across the Pacific--with "due weight" given to the greater efficiency of the Central Pacific drive--had been agreed upon at Quebec and reaffirmed in Cairo by Combined Chiefs of Staff. In light of MacArthur's continued call for a single unified drive, King recommended the Marshall instruct the SWPA commander to obey orders.⁴² Marshall apparently continued his restraint and sent no such directive to Australia.

King interpreted the Combined Chiefs' vision as endorsing a strong drive across the Central Pacific to Luzon and then on to the coast of China.⁴³ This could have resulted in Nimitz "returning" to Manila instead of MacArthur, a scenario that was obviously unacceptable to the latter.⁴⁴ MacArthur, possibly in desperation, sent his Chief of Staff General Sutherland, to present his strategic vision to the Joint Chiefs in February. In response to this lack of consensus, Marshall recommended the reexamination of the Pacific strategy by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee (JSSC).⁴⁵ Again the dangers of command by committee are illustrated by this continued indecision. Throughout this period operational and logistical planners had been dividing their effort between the two drives and efficiency could not help but be lost.

At this point MacArthur decided to improve his bargaining position. Seizing upon a report from his air commander that Japanese positions in the Admiralty Islands appeared to be deserted, he ordered a "reconnaissance in force" by about 1,000 men of Los Negros Island in late February. MacArthur chose to ignore both his intelligence officer who estimated that 4,000 troops remained and most of the rest of his staff who argued that logistical difficulties would be insurmountable. This same island had been

scheduled to be invaded by a full division in April. MacArthur chose to accompany the operation personally, probably so he could be on hand to decide whether the reconnaissance force should become an invasion force or withdraw.⁴⁶ Of note for one who claimed to hold the Navy in such high regard, this appears to have been MacArthur's first time at sea aboard a major combatant. On the other hand, MacArthur's prediction that the Japanese would waste their troops in piecemeal attacks proved accurate and the 1,000 troops were able to hold the island until reinforcements arrived, even though the actual enemy strength proved remarkable close to the intelligence estimate of 4,000.⁴⁷ While MacArthur's gamble paid off, it was a gamble nonetheless and things could have easily gone the other way. The amphibious commander on the spot later observed that had the Japanese concentrated their forces the first night, "there is little question that [we] would have been overrun."⁴⁸

MacArthur's gamble paid off on a larger scale as well. The capture of the Admiralties two months ahead of schedule came just as the JSSC was preparing to recommend that the Central Pacific drive be given priority. Capitalizing on this his success he also forwarded a proposal to jump nearly 600 miles up the New Guinea coast and seize Hollandia, bypassing 40,000 Japanese troops.⁴⁹ With MacArthur's position now substantially improved, the JSSC's calculations had to be reworked. In March the Joint Chiefs summoned Nimitz and MacArthur to Washington in order to attempt to solidify Pacific strategy. MacArthur claimed to be too busy to leave his theater and sent Sutherland in his stead. On 12 March, following each theater's presentation the Joint Chiefs decided to compromise again. MacArthur would be allowed to invade Mindanao in the southern Philippines, but he would not be directed to invade Luzon unless Nimitz's

drive to Formosa required support from Luzon.⁵⁰ Thus MacArthur's return to Manila now appeared unlikely to be accomplished by Nimitz, but still might come significantly later than he desired.

The indecisive matter in which the issue of priority had been addressed made further debate inevitable. From March to July MacArthur and Nimitz executed the tasks they had been assigned, but the question of Luzon or Formosa remained unresolved and began to weigh heavily on planners from Washington to Port Moresby. In early July King traveled to the Pacific to view the situation first hand and discuss strategy with Nimitz and his senior subordinate commanders. Nimitz remained undecided on the Formosa-Luzon question, but two of his top admirals, Spruance and Turner, firmly opposed landing on Formosa before securing Luzon. Spruance even proposed bypassing both and taking Iwo Jima as the next step. King, who had learned that Roosevelt was en route Hawaii to hear from the theater commanders, listened to their views but remained convinced that Formosa was the right choice. He departed Hawaii before the President arrived, having done his best to convince Nimitz to argue his case; but not having ordered him to do so.⁵¹

Both King and MacArthur dismissed Roosevelt's trip--without the Joint Chiefs accompanying him--as a calculated political ploy, designed to show the voters that the President was single-handedly winning the war.⁵² During two long sessions with the President at a "palatial residence" on the beach MacArthur and Nimitz presented their arguments for Luzon and Formosa respectively. The discussion was apparently cordial as Admiral Leahy--accompanying the President as his Personal Chief of Staff vice a member of the Joint Chiefs--later recalled, "It was both pleasant and very informative to

have the two men who had been pictured as antagonists calmly presenting their differing views to the Commander in Chief.”⁵³

As each man presented his case, it became apparent that MacArthur passionately believed in his point of view while Nimitz retained reservations about his. During the course of the discussion Nimitz had at least one opportunity to exercise restraint equal to that shown by Marshall in similar circumstances. When asked by the President about the high casualties likely on Luzon, MacArthur replied, “Mr. President, my losses would not be heavy, any more than they have been in the past. . . . frontal assault is only for mediocre commanders. Your good commanders do not turn in heavy losses.”⁵⁴ Since Nimitz had been recently criticized in the press for the high casualties incurred during amphibious assaults in the Central Pacific, this criticism seemed squarely aimed at him. He chose not to rise to the bait.⁵⁵ Nonetheless MacArthur’s sincerity was convincing, and in the end the President had maneuvered the debate to the point where Nimitz essentially agreed. MacArthur believed that the issue had now been decided.⁵⁶

However, the President--possibly fearing press accounts of an imperious Commander in Chief overruling the military expertise of the Joint Chiefs--issued no guidance regarding Pacific strategy following the Hawaii conference. The debate therefore raged on. King stuck to his position on into autumn, despite the opposition of the President and both theater commanders.⁵⁷ Thus the staff officers in Washington, Pearl Harbor, and Port Moresby continued to plug away at two competing and probably mutually exclusive plans. Had other events not intervened, the obstinacy of MacArthur and King might have resulted in both campaigns being unnecessarily delayed.

In September 1944, pilots from Admiral Halsey's carrier forces reported very weak opposition when raiding Japanese positions in the central Philippines. Halsey, seeking to exploit this weakness, recommended to Nimitz that intervening operations in both the Central and Southwest Pacific be cancelled and a combined assault on Leyte Island in the Philippines be carried out as soon as possible, under MacArthur's command.⁵⁸ Nimitz concurred with Halsey's recommendation and forwarded it to the Joint Chiefs, who were meeting again in Quebec at the time. The Joint Chiefs quickly forwarded the idea to MacArthur for comment. Since the Supreme Commander was at sea under radio silence, General Sutherland answered for him. Correctly perceiving the Leyte operation as enabling an earlier attack on Luzon, Sutherland replied with MacArthur's approval--despite intelligence within SWPA indicating Japanese strength on Leyte was greater than Halsey believed.⁵⁹

When MacArthur returned, he was delighted with Sutherland's initiative and quickly informed the Joint Chiefs that based upon an October invasion of Leyte, he could execute the invasion of Luzon in December.⁶⁰ Since logistical limitations rendered an assault on Formosa impossible before February, the issue finally appeared to have been decided. However, King still did not give up. He acknowledged the desirability of invading Luzon first, but continued to cling to the idea of invading Formosa as well. He was finally convinced to shelve the idea--the operation was never actually cancelled--after meeting with Nimitz in late September.⁶¹

While the endless debate between King and MacArthur does not appear to have caused irreparable damage to the Allied war effort, it was certainly not without costs. The division of effort without clear priority caused much wasted planning and staff work

and hampered the efficient distribution of resources. Had this staff work been directed toward productive ends and had resources been more efficiently allocated success might have been achieved sooner. Fortunately for the Allied cause, American industrial production proved sufficient to adequately support both efforts, limiting the effect of the inherent inefficiency. On the other hand, the pressure of competition probably had some positive effects as well. Had MacArthur not felt he was in danger of losing the race, he might not have gambled on the early invasion of the Admiralty Islands or the leap to Hollandia. Both these gambles paid off handsomely but the risk they carried cannot be ignored simply because they succeeded.

It is further possible to envision far greater negative effects from such a head-to-head struggle, up to and including the angry resignation of King or MacArthur or both, had Marshall and other leaders not intervened. Such a resignation would have severely disrupted Allied strategy and shaken America's morale. Therefore the lessons from this case are fairly simple. When two dominant personalities with approximately equal power-bases set themselves upon directly conflicting courses, indecision is probably the best that can result. Managing the conflict will require the active intervention of other parties and disaster may still be the outcome.

These three cases have been chosen to demonstrate three possible situations where one or more dominant personalities impact strategic decisions. In the first case a dominant audacious personality acting unopposed was able to shape Allied strategy in his own image. This resulted in a daring approach to defensive operations which paid high dividends and probably shortened the war. The decision to shift quickly to the offensive-defensive following the victory at Midway was driven in large part by competition

between two dominant personalities striving toward the same goal. In this case, there were two offsetting results. First a proper assessment of risk seems to have been set aside in the bidding war over who would seize the initiative. To borrow a concept from physics, it was a case of positive interference where each man's daring augmented the other's and Allied strategy reflected the sum of their courage. On the other hand, the bureaucratic wrangling that accompanied the competition tended to act as a brake on Allied planning. So in the end Operation Watchtower was executed before it was prudent, with barely adequate support and compressed planning. In the third case endless debate was the result when two dominant personalities set themselves on directly opposing paths. This continuous dispute consumed countless hours of staff work and diluted Allied power in the Pacific for much of the war. Only the skillful diplomacy of other leaders and the massive American industrial base prevented the struggle from more seriously affecting the Allied cause. The more general observations that may be derived from these three cases along with some concrete recommendations will be discussed in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

With the influence of these two dominant personalities upon Allied strategy in the Pacific throughout the war clearly demonstrated, there remains the issue of meaning. What lessons can future leaders take from the cases that have been presented? Before examining such lessons, a brief recap is in order.

This chapter will first recall the basic assumptions about personality--both how it is identified and its impact on decision making. The key traits of a dominant personality will be reviewed and the evidence from the early lives of King and MacArthur that they fit--perhaps define--the mold will be cited. Following these observations, some topics for future research into the phenomenon of dominant personality will be suggested. Before the dominance of MacArthur and King over strategy in the three key cases is discussed, a few observations relating to the role of other personality types and posterity's view of individuals possessing a dominant personality will be offered. Finally, the key lessons from the cases will be summarized, and the chapter will close with some recommendations for future leaders.

Individuals displaying forceful, aggressive, confident personality characteristics coupled with above-average intelligence tend gain influence within any organization, whether or not their formal position gives them this influence. This personality type, to which this thesis has assigned the label dominant, is generally evident early in the individual's life. This study has assumed that personality traits remain generally stable throughout one's lifetime and that early success predicts later triumphs. It seems likely

that the latter assumption is a direct result of the former. The lives of both MacArthur and King certainly seem to support these assumptions.

The essential character of each man seems to have been first clearly revealed in his later childhood, at the point when each decided to attend his respective academy. From that moment on, both dominated those around them. Each man graduated at the top of his high school class and each easily won a spot at his chosen academy through competitive examination. At West Point, MacArthur finished first in his class academically in three out of four years, including his last. More significantly in this author's opinion he achieved the cadet rank of "First Captain." As the top cadet in the student's military structure, he was singled out as a leader among leaders. King appears to have chosen to avoid the reputation that would accompany the top graduate academically, graduating fourth in his class. However, he also achieved the top cadet rank at Annapolis, demonstrating his dominance of those around him.

This dominance continued in both cases as each man continued to achieve success despite the frequent confrontations each provoked with his superiors. Such quarrels are probably inevitable when a dominant personality is placed in a modern military system. When an individual seeks to dominate another who holds greater rank and authority, but less confidence and competence, the result is likely to be confrontation. Alexander the Great was almost certainly a dominant personality, but likely did not have to endure seniors of lesser competence. There is much to be said for being the heir to the throne. However, the fundamental military abilities of MacArthur and King allowed each to survive such clashes and continue to rise toward the power each would enjoy in the Second World War.

When one individual of this personality type gains influence over strategy, the results can be decisive. By combining audacity with the force of personality to shape strategy such a person can influence an entire nation's conduct in war. King pushed through daring early raids that dramatically affected the course of the war. On the other hand, if unchecked one man's reckless tendencies can place the entire effort at risk. When two such individuals are working in parallel competition, both these phenomena are amplified. Thus strategy becomes even more daring and carries even heavier risks. King and MacArthur together forced the invasion of Guadalcanal before many thought it prudent and despite the Allied commitment to defeating Germany first. This invasion allowed the Allies to maintain momentum following the victory at Midway but was conducted on such a narrow margin that it could have failed. Finally, when two dominant personalities are working in direct confrontation, decisive planning is handicapped and resources are applied with less than optimum efficiency. Furthermore, the competition between two such individuals can become so fierce that each is even less willing to consider the risks and consequences of his or her actions. Thus a person's natural audacity can become blind recklessness.

Assuming the concept of dominant personality presented by this thesis is valid, there must have been other individuals who have similarly impacted the strategic direction of a nation in a major conflict. Investigation of the lives of such individuals, using the methodology employed in this thesis, could prove the value of the concept. One such case may have been the long-term influence of Helmut von Molke over the German General Staff. Another individual who almost certainly possessed a dominant personality provided the quote that opened this thesis, Napoleon Bonaparte.

Furthermore, there must be other examples from history where two such dominant personalities have clashed, each wishing to direct the course of a conflict. One possible example, from the same time period as this thesis, may be found in the extended struggle between British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery and American General George Patton to lead the primary Allied effort in Europe. History is certainly replete with further examples as well.

Before the lessons from the three cases examined in this thesis are examined in greater detail, some further observations are also in order. This thesis is not intended to suggest that only individuals who possess a dominant personality will be able to shape strategy. Other individuals, with significantly different traits, may also have meaningful impact. The best example in this context is Admiral Nimitz, who was a capable leader but one who generally sought consensus and adopted a low-impact style. As demonstrated earlier, Nimitz's primary strategic function during the war was to execute the plan dictated by King. However despite the limitations imposed by having a dominant personality as his immediate superior, Nimitz still managed considerable impact. It was his caution that insisted upon the fortification of Samoa and other islands before beginning carrier raids. He and his staff came up with the plan to ambush the Japanese at Midway, turning the tide of the war.¹ Finally, his ability to work with MacArthur--a tendency which often aroused King's rage--allowed the two theaters to be mutually supporting as well as competitive. King recognized his value as well, recommending that Nimitz succeed him as Chief of Naval Operations despite their earlier clashes.

A dominant personality also does not appear particularly valuable to posterity. MacArthur is well known even today and his ardent admirers remain legion. However, he was plagued with vocal critics throughout his life and those criticisms have not faded over the years. King, on the other hand, is almost forgotten. It has been this author's experience that most military officers and nearly all civilians do not recognize his name. Thomas Buell--who would later author the only complete biography of King--illustrates this point vividly. He was a midshipman in 1958 when King was buried at Annapolis. He recalls that he hardly recognized King's name when told by a fellow midshipman observing the funeral.²

The general opinion in most discussions seems to be that Nimitz or MacArthur won the war in the Pacific. The Navy's formal recognition of each man speaks volumes as well. In 1960 a destroyer was named after King. The *King* was not the lead ship in the class and she is no longer in service. On the other hand, the *Nimitz*, commissioned fifteen years later, is the lead ship of a class of aircraft carriers that continue to be built today. Thus the nine--soon to be ten--most powerful warships in the world all carry the name *Nimitz*-class carrier. It is little wonder that he remains well known. The naming of these ships is rather ironic when the careers of both officers are considered.

King was a qualified naval aviator and served for years in numerous positions of authority within the community, from carrier skipper to Chief of the Bureau of Aviation. The first time Nimitz, a submariner, commanded aviators was December 1941; and when he did finally command carriers, he was often criticized for using them improperly.³ While the Army has fewer namesakes to confer than the Navy, the fact that there is

neither a *MacArthur* tank nor a *MacArthur* infantry fighting vehicle would probably not sit well with the general were he alive today.

The reason that MacArthur and King are remembered with something less than fondness in many cases seems clear. The same characteristics that made them dominant personalities were unlikely to make them many friends and certain to produce numerous enemies. Their arrogance and lack of concern for feelings of others allowed them to act decisively, but left considerable resentment in their wakes.

Despite these two qualifications--it is not necessary to possess a dominant personality to influence strategy and that such a personality may not enhance one's reputation--it remains evident that dominant personalities can dramatically shape strategy. The impact of the personalities of King and MacArthur is clearly stamped upon Allied strategy in the Pacific. In hindsight, this impact generally served to improve the strategy and shortened the course of the war. However, there were negative consequences as well. The benefits accrued and costs imposed by the involvement of these two dominant personalities in the three cases studied will be recapped below.

King's intense desire, following the humiliation of Pearl Harbor, to begin offensive operations against Japan as soon as it was even remotely possible to do so fundamentally shaped early Allied strategy. He seems to have been the sole--or at least the most vocal--advocate of this course of action. It will be recalled that King's demands that Nimitz strike somewhere were coming with "increasing urgency" by the end of January. Furthermore it was King's personal involvement that placed the two carriers under Vice Admiral Brown northeast of Australia in March and his specific command that launched the air strikes at Lae and Salamaua, air strikes that would have strategic

impact beyond their minor tactical success. King's enduring fondness for innovation, which must have spread to his staff as well, was instrumental in devising the plan to strike Japan with Army bombers launched from Navy carriers. His personal support saw the plan through to fruition, despite the significant risk. Gambling one third of the United States' carrier force on a raid that few thought would have significant impact was a choice many leaders would not have made. With the benefit of hindsight it is apparent that the Doolittle raid on Tokyo also had strategic impact far beyond the meager damage inflicted. The tremendous humiliation inflicted upon Japan's military leaders by the attack eliminated remaining opposition to Yamamoto's complex plan to eliminate the American fleet at Midway. When this plan led to disaster for the Japanese, the entire course of the war was altered. Thus King's gambles in early 1942 paid off more handsomely than even he could likely have imagined.

However, the minor losses incurred by Allied forces during these raids could easily have been far heavier. A lucky Japanese submarine or patrol plane could have easily led to the loss of one or both of the carriers involved in each case. Had such losses occurred at a time when the Navy's resources were stretched so thin, King's audacity might have set back the Allied effort in the Pacific by years. It might be possible to argue that the loss of either *Enterprise* or *Hornet* or both would have been a bearable price to pay for the victory at Midway, except without the involvement of both these ships there could have been no such victory. In this case it seems clear that King's aggressiveness, innovation, and daring significantly advanced the Allied cause during the spring of 1942. While the risks incurred were equally significant, King apparently calculated correctly and the costs were slight. Therefore, when a single dominant personality acts to shape

strategy, it appears the individual imposes his or her aggressiveness and other characteristics over the resulting choices. The net effect, if unchecked, can cause strategic decisions that carry significant risks but promise significant gains. When two dominant personalities are involved both the risks and the gains are amplified.

The strategic decisions that led to the invasion of Guadalcanal in August 1942 were the result of two such personalities acting in parallel competition. MacArthur and King each sought to seize the initiative following the victory at Midway. Each likely perceived three adversaries to gaining this initiative, the Japanese, Allied planners who wished to funnel all available resources to Europe, and each other. Both recognized that Japanese were off balance following the disaster at Midway; and both further recognized that once Allied troops were engaged in offensive operations against Japanese they would have to be supported, no matter the cost to the build-up in Europe. With two common foes and only a single realistic opportunity to attack, it is hardly surprising that both men pushed operations in the South Pacific aimed at neutralizing the Japanese base at Rabaul. Thus the daring nature of both men--likely augmented by a clear-eyed perception of the politics of coalition warfare--prompted an aggressive Allied strategy when others might have counseled caution or maintained complete faith with "Germany first." Had King alone advocated such a move the other Joint Chiefs would likely have successfully opposed him. However, with MacArthur pushing a similar campaign the Joint Chiefs' resistance faltered. While the audacity of MacArthur and King spurred strategy on, their vanity and distrust of each other produced harmful competition with two dangerous results. The first danger came from the "bidding war" in which each sought dominance. MacArthur initially proposed to take Rabaul in less than three weeks, a proposal that was

either fatally optimistic or a calculated move to gain the initiative. King's decision to stonewall this proposal and his threat to invade the Solomons without Army support was even more reckless and was also likely a calculated bluff. Had either of these bluffs been called, the results could have been disastrous. The second hazard of this competition was the planning gridlock that resulted from each man's stubbornness. Nearly half the two months that passed between the Battle of Midway and the invasion of Guadalcanal were wasted by this wrangling. By the time the Joint Chiefs issued the necessary order--which took less than three days to prepare once Marshall and King agreed in principle--planners had barely four weeks before the target date for the invasion. While the operation ultimately succeeded, it seems unlikely that the rush to initiate offensive operations coupled with the artificially compressed planning produced the most efficient or effective plan. Thus two dominant personalities in parallel competition seem to have both increased the strategic risk and decreased operational efficiency.

In the long-term struggle for primacy in defeating Japan, the two dominant personalities caused similar problems. Both MacArthur and King firmly believed that the drive which each was planning to be the most effective path to defeat Japan. Each fought long and hard throughout 1943 and 1944 to prove their point and win the lion's share of resources going to the Pacific. The Joint and Combined Chiefs of Staff equivocated and refused to come down firmly on either side, allowing the debate to rage on. As the issue was discussed both men pushed their respective drives across the Pacific--although Nimitz was technically in charge of the Central Pacific campaign the pressure from King was unrelenting--seeking to improve their bargaining position. Thus each effort was pursued aggressively but resources were constantly divided between the two. Had

American war production not risen to the challenge, this lack of focus could have proven very costly.

The debate boiled to a head in the summer of 1944 when the President decided to step in directly and attempt to resolve the issue, which by now had come down to the choice between establishing Formosa or the Philippines as the primary objective. Although both MacArthur and King--probably with some merit--dismissed the President's trip to Hawaii as a mere political stunt, it did give the two theater commanders a chance to debate the issue face-to-face. In such a debate the dominant personality will likely carry the day, particularly if the opposing positions are relatively equal in merit. Thus MacArthur brought Nimitz around to his point of view and believed he had the President in his corner as well, again directly illustrating the impact of personality on strategy. However, Roosevelt chose not to impose his will--if he had indeed been convinced at all--upon the Joint Chiefs and the other dominant personality was not about to give up short of a direct order to do so. King, vividly demonstrating the danger of such a personality, dug in his heels and continued to fight for Formosa. Since the issue remained unresolved, planners in Washington and in theater continued to split their efforts and the nation's resources between the two drives. Events in the Pacific eventually made King's position untenable. The invasion of Leyte Island decided the debate by default.

However, before this resolution occurred the bitter struggle had consumed countless hours of staff time, generated mountains of unneeded paperwork, robbed Allied efforts of focus, and seriously degraded efficiency across the board. That this inefficiency did not have greater impact on the overall war effort is a function of both

luck--the Japanese never truly exploited the divided effort--and the phenomenal industrial capability of the United States, which was able to reasonably support both drives. A more likely result of any such future confrontation between dominant personalities, with approximately equal power bases and diametrically opposed agendas, would be strategic paralysis with tragic consequences.

What then is a leader responsible for assigning responsibilities to such individuals to do? There is little value in second guessing President Roosevelt; he made the decisions that placed King and MacArthur in their respective positions in the context of the times and the circumstances. However, there are some remedies available to future leaders. From formal doctrine and procedures to honest self-assessment, tools exist to manage personality's impact on strategy.

The split between MacArthur and King was at its fundamental level a divide between competing services; each man remained loyal to his own and distrusted the other. The command relationships at that time allowed such a split to have great impact. Over the last half-century several steps have been taken to remedy such splits. The first was the establishment of the Department of Defense, which pushed the Army-Navy-Air Force battles below cabinet level by placing the Secretary of Defense over all the services. A larger step was the creation, and later empowerment, of Unified Commanders with specific geographic or functional boundaries and authority over all military forces within those boundaries. Thus today one individual commands all U.S. forces in an area encompassing the theaters of both MacArthur and Nimitz. Competition could still occur when a conflict spills across these boundaries; but doctrine provides that one commander be given the lead in such a case, referring to all other commanders as

“supporting.” Therefore doctrine has given future leaders powerful tools to manage dominant personalities.

Since future leaders--both political and military--might likely *be* dominant personalities some critical self-assessment is required as well. For the future leader who sees in himself or herself the traits of MacArthur or King some caution is in order. It has been clearly demonstrated that such characteristics can be very dangerous as well as extremely valuable during conflict. However, the capacity for frank self-examination does not necessarily appear to be a characteristic associated with such personalities--it certainly was not present in a significant degree in King or MacArthur. Therefore even a future leader who does not identify with King or MacArthur would do well to keep caution in mind and utilize all the checks and balances that are available. This thesis does not mean to condemn audacity--it is certainly true that few conflicts have been won by remaining on the defensive--but MacArthur and King offer a clear caution against blind audacity.

1. Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 168-9.

2. Thomas B. Buell, *Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Fleet Admiral J. Ernest King* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1980), xxi.

3. *Ibid.*, 366.

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